

A Wolf in the House

Dogs and people share a long history. They have been together for at least 12,000 years, perhaps longer. Dogs were the first animals that ancient people were able to tame (domesticate).

We share the earth with about 37 species of wild dogs. These include coyotes, foxes, jackals, African hunting dogs and wolves. There are more than 400 different breeds of domestic dogs in the world. All of them, from the biggest St. Bernard to the smallest chihuahua, developed from the wolf.

Wolves are social animals. This means they live in groups. Each group or pack is lead by a male and a female. These two leaders are the strongest animals in the pack. All the other wolves obey them.

Wolves communicate with each other in many ways. For example, they can use different expressions. When a wolf curls his lips up and shows his sharp teeth, he's warning other wolves to stay away.

Wolves can also send messages with their bodies. A wolf that puts his ears up, holds his tail stiffly in the air and looks as if he's walking on tiptoe is telling other wolves that he's the boss. This wolf may attack. A wolf that doesn't want to be attacked puts his ears down and holds his tail between his legs. He may even roll on his back. Dogs today still show many of these wolf-like behaviours.

You've probably been told not to run away from a strange dog, even one that's barking at you. Do you know why?

Wolves chase animals for food. A dog, like a wolf, may chase you if you start to run. If you stand still or walk away slowly, he's less likely to harm you.

If you own a dog, your dog thinks of you and your family as his pack. If your dog is well trained, he will obey you. If you don't train your dog, however, he may try to become the leader. He may growl at you or push you down, trying to get you to do what he wants.

Dogs, like wolves, are pack animals. A dog left by himself gets lonely. Like people, dogs want to have company.