



Unleashed **WHELPING & WEANING**

This article is adapted from one written by J. Binstead, a trainer using Chris Bach's Third Way. If your dog has behavior problems, this could be why! And even if your dog is a canine Miss (or Mr) Congeniality, this information is extremely important, if you ever consider adopting another dog or puppy into your family.

Whelping:

- ❖ To give birth to

Weaning:

- ❖ To detach from Mom's milk bags

Mainstream dynamics of how puppies are raised by breeders from birth to the time they go to their new homes has a major impact on their ability to interact with humans and other dogs. Chris Bach's The Third Way theory is that breeder interference, while well intentioned, is causing many of the problems we see with our dogs' social skills. Breeders tend to remove pups from mommy milk-bags (aka the bitch) too soon, which does not allow the pups to learn necessary social skills from their mothers. Without those skills, pups have difficulty living harmoniously with their new human families. Breeders commonly believe that by keeping the litters together, without mom, that the puppies will learn these social skills from each other. As it turns out, however, puppies raised this way are lacking in self-imposed self-control (in other words, they can't calm themselves down), bite inhibition, the ability to accurately read other dogs signals and body language, and regard for personal space (both theirs and/or ours). Undesirable behaviors often then develop, including using the owner's pant leg for tug-o-war, nipping at the owner's chin, grabbing and holding onto earlobes, and aggressive body slamming. All these behaviors result because the puppy never learned to read another creature's body signals saying, "Stay out of my space."

As J. Binstead writes, "They would approach any dog as if that dog was their long lost buddy never looking for the signs that they were welcome, just assumed they were."

What does a well-adjusted mother dog teach her puppies?

Mom teaches not to be pushy and hog all the food.

Mom teaches when she is and is not available (for feeding and other things).

Mom teaches not to bite too hard as puppies' teeth develop.

Mom generally does not allow mounting, pulling on ears and biting the back of legs.

The most dramatic difference is that puppies left with Mom are much more educated about how to approach and interact with other dogs by correctly reading their signals. Refraining from interfering in this ancient and natural process can have a profound effect on the puppies we produce. If breeders would allow the bitch to do her job and raise the puppies with support, not interference, much of the obnoxious behaviors listed above would be eliminated.

Not all bitches have these needed qualities, so removing those who do not can only improve breeding programs. So it is up to us to choose the bitches that are good nurturers, which will allow us to place puppies in their new homes with many of the important social skills and self-control traits already in place. For those of us who aren't breeders, it's important to look for pups who have been raised with a normal, well-adjusted mom. These traits will make the transition into the human family a little smoother for both new owners and puppy, and eliminate the need for problem-solving later in the puppy's—or adult dog's—life.