

# Advice on dogs, life and love



ask dog lady

Dear Dog Lady,

My dog Hank, a mixed hound/terrier/shepherd, is the apple of my eye. I raised him from a pup, and we've always shared a very close bond. I walk him at least three miles per day, feed him, bathe him and generally am his primary caretaker. Recently, my stepdaughter has come to live with us. I've noticed that Hank really likes her, but I have noticed that the affections he once showed me have been transferred to her. For instance, he gets excited and kisses her when he sees her, and he rarely does that around me anymore. I know this may sound crazy to some, but I feel really hurt. I feel as if my dog is choosing my stepdaughter over me.

I've felt really upset lately, and I've been keeping it all inside so that my family doesn't think I am being ridiculous. However, these feelings are very real to me, and I am not sure what to do. Am I over-reacting?  
—Dee

*Dee, have you ever observed resting dogs that are truly comfortable with each other interact with one another? They don't. They ignore. This is a dog's way of telling another dog: "Friend, I need only to breathe your air to feel peaceful." Let's imagine Hank feels similarly toward you.*

*Your stepdaughter must bring a novel energy to the home and to all who dwell within, including the dog. She obviously likes Hank and wants to hang with him. This is good.*

*Try not to take it personally. Hank will always have his primary bond with you. He can kiss other girls but you're the girl with whom he'll always go home.*

Dear Dog Lady,

My husband and I rescued a five-year-old (we think) female Pomeranian and named her Buttercup. Of course she does not respond to that name and the Humane Society has no idea what her name was before. I've read that dog names should be short and usually no more than one syllable. Is Buttercup a bad name? How long do you think it will take before she realizes it's her name and starts to socialize with our other dog (a Peke-a-poo)? Any help you can pro-

vide would be greatly appreciated.

—Joy

*Joy, Buttercup is a lovely name, albeit syllabically challenging. Usually, dogs respond best to names of two syllables. But, understand, they don't respond to the name per se but to the tones and sounds of the moniker. If you don't want to parse Buttercup into "But-But" or "Cup-Cup" or "But-Cup," you should say "Buttercup" over and over and over again. Say it soothingly, musically, whimsically. Say it when you give your dog a treat or any time you train her or walk with her. Even if her name was "Spike" in the shelter, she will learn to respond to "Buttercup" as she bonds with you. Give her time—six weeks or more—to adjust like buttah.*

Dear Dog Lady,

I work at a small software company where dogs are allowed. I only bring my sheltie Liza when thunderstorms are predicted (because she goes nuts and chews things if left home alone), but some people bring their dogs everyday. Having dogs around in the office makes for a nice atmosphere, except when they steal food.

My boss' Vizsla, Bongo, is the chief bandit. If I put any food on my desk, Bongo appears out of nowhere and grabs the bran muffin, sandwich and my favorite chocolate yogurt. Even if the food is wrapped, he breaks into any bag, tears off the packaging and consumes anything before I have time to stop him. We have cubicles so I can't close a door and I don't want to cause a commotion by yelling, "No!" or "Stop!" I have lost so much food to Bongo. I used to like reading the newspaper or a book while I took my lunch break and ate. Now I have to shovel it in while hunched over to protect myself against Bongo's raids. I want to talk to my boss about this but am nervous. How can I discuss Bongo's behavior with her?  
—Mary

*Mary, be up-front with your boss. For your courage, you may end up as the office heroine because Bongo's banditry probably impacts everyone. Tell your boss directly that Bongo swipes any food not nailed down to your desk. (Actually, Bongo sounds like the type to gobble the nails, too). Explain how this leaves you guarding your grub like a lioness in a National Geographic documentary. Also, express concern for Bongo because bran muffins studded with raisins and chocolate yogurt are not the best diet for a dog. Surely, your boss will take no offense if you present the brief against Bongo in a straightforward but cheerful style.*

*Allowing dogs in the office is a perk. Your boss, if she's any sort of an enlightened manager, should realize that straining the bowser benefit is not in anyone's best interest.*

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