



Aunty Kaye's

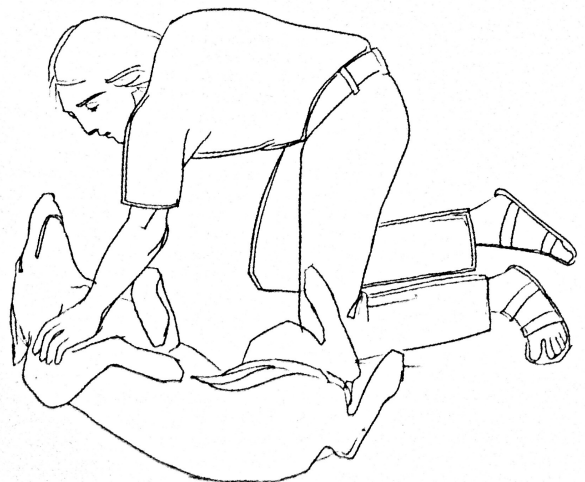


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## What is an "Alpha roll"?

The "alpha roll (or roll over)" is a form of physical punishment or "correction" used in traditional compulsive training methods to discipline dogs. It consists of grabbing the dog, usually by the scruff and hurling the dog to the ground, usually pinning the dog on his or her back, in a submissive position.

The Alpha Roll was described and popularised in a book called **How To Be Your Dog's Best Friend** by the Monks of New Skete (1978) - see illustration opposite. The Monks of New Skete are a religious order who support themselves by breeding and selling German Shepherd Dogs.



*The Alpha-wolf roll-over. Drama and surprise are essential in this technique.*

They argued that it is "natural", in that it imitates what wolves or dogs in the wild do to discipline or control subordinate members of the pack. It is alleged to be done especially by the "alpha wolf" or leader of the pack, or sometimes by the Alpha female disciplining her puppies. According to this philosophy, the basis of dog training is that the dog's owner assumes the role of the "alpha wolf" or pack leader, and dominates the dog by these means.

Many people now argue that these physical dominance techniques are based on a misinterpretation of canine behaviour, that they are dangerous and counterproductive, and that non-confrontational methods are preferable. Training based on "showing the dog who's boss" by confrontational techniques, such as the scruff-shake or alpha rollover) causes problems that are non-existent when using positive reinforcement.

- The most serious problem is that the dog can be provoked into defensive biting by this treatment.
- For some dogs, those with more sensitive temperaments, the Alpha Roll can lead to fear and avoidance of being handled.
- The Alpha Roll has been used on young puppies. In extreme cases, this can lead to death by suffocation or physical injury.

## What is an Alpha Roll? (continued)

**Job Michael Evans**, one of the co-authors of the Monks book, left the Monks and became a famous dog trainer and award-winning author of many books about training. In 1993 he gave the keynote address at the inaugural Canadian APDT Conference in Toronto. I had the privilege of meeting him at that time. In his speech **he said that he no longer advocated the Alpha Roll or Scruff Shake because too many dog owners had been bitten following this advice**. However the Monks owned the copyright of the book and refused to change it. Sadly Job died a few months later.

It took the best dog trainers in North America over ten years to change the climate of opinion and to prevail upon the Monks to revise their advice in the second edition of the book, published in 2004.

Many of the Monks' ideas were good and ahead of their time. They especially focussed on early training and socialisation so that their puppies could become good family pets. This was much better than the formal obedience training of the day that had little to offer people needing everyday life control at home. For example they taught a Long Down at dinner time.

**"I no longer advocate the Alpha Roll or Scruff Shake because too many owners got bitten following this advice."  
- Job Michael Evans,  
Toronto, 1993**



**Even in the first edition of the book, where the Alpha Roll was recommended, they said it was to be used on large, usually male, adult German Shepherds whose behaviour was serious. The big guns were for use in exceptional circumstances, not for showing baby puppies who's boss. So this vogue amongst correction trainers for Alpha rolling pups is totally out of line.**

## WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THE ALPHA ROLL

"Indeed, the use of such confrontational training techniques can provoke fear in the dog and lead to defensively aggressive behavior toward the person administering the aversive action."

- Dr Sophia Yin, DVM

An example of overkill is the alpha roll. (...) (Job Michael Evans himself stated, before his death, that he regretted that they ever covered that subject in How to be Your Dog's Best Friend, because the alpha roll has been grossly misused.)

I've seen clients coming from these kind of trainers. Hand shy, mouthy, nervous, frustrated pups. Very sad. I saw a pup that urinated when you looked at her.

- Western suburbs trainer

It means trainers using these methods don't understand how animals learn. The relationship has to be based on trust.

- Dr Katrina Gregory

"Our study demonstrated that many confrontational training methods, whether staring down dogs, striking them, or intimidating them with physical manipulation, do little to correct improper behavior and can elicit aggressive responses."

Megan Herron,  
DVM

Beware of yelling, poking, jabbing, objects being thrown at or near the dog, loud noises used for startling, physically forcing dogs into position, alpha rolls or any kind of pinning, etc. Any reference to the words "alpha" or "dominance" should also make you sit up and take notice, as that's a good indication that the trainer is leaning on that nonsensical old myth.

Leah Roberts

Trainers who feel they must "alpha roll" the dog, or use scruff shakes or other physical methods to dominate the dog, simply don't know any other way to handle the situation. If they did, they wouldn't be resorting to the "law of the jungle." Sure, physical force will stop the behavior at the moment, assuming the trainer is strong enough and forceful enough. But it doesn't solve the underlying problem.

- Nicole Wilde

## **DEBUNKING DOMINANCE IN DOGS**

(extract from **Australian Veterinary Association** information).

Anyone with a 'pushy', 'rude' or 'demanding' dog has probably been told at some stage to 'show them who's boss' or to 'make them submit'. The advice usually involves physically punishing the dog by forcing it onto its side (the 'alpha roll'), or to hold eye contact whilst growling at the dog. These confrontational techniques are a bad idea. They are very risky and may result in escalation of aggression.

Punishment will not calm an agitated dog. Punishment will increase both fear and excitability, and a growl may then escalate into a bite. Punishing your dog for growling may also inadvertently teach it to suppress the warning growl and bite with no warning.

If your dog is anxious, punishment will make the anxiety worse. Punishment also fails to teach your dog how you want it to behave, and can ruin your dog's trust in you and other people.

## **ASPCA Position**

The ASPCA supports training methods that are based on an understanding of how animals learn and incorporate kindness and respect for both the pet and the guardian. Humane training does not inflict unnecessary distress or discomfort on the pet. Humane training makes primary use of lures and rewards such as food, praise, petting and play. In addition to lures and rewards, there are many training tools and types of equipment designed to assist guardians in managing their pets' behavior at home and in public places. The ASPCA supports the use of methods and equipment that effectively accomplish the training objective with the least amount of stress for the pet. The ASPCA is opposed to any training equipment that causes a pet to experience physical discomfort or undue anxiety.

## **AVSAB Position Statement**

**"The Use of Punishment for  
Behavior Modification in  
Animals" See:  
[vetmed.ucdavis.edu](http://vetmed.ucdavis.edu)**