

Title: Corso in the Community

Subtitle: Corso Information

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Date: 2007/9/4

URL: <http://www.thefocc.com/xoops/modules/article/view.article.php/c6/8>

Summary: **Are you and your Corso doing your bit for large breed relations?**

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Why should I bother? It's other people's problem if they don't like my dog right? Not necessarily so. It's vital that you look at your dog from other people's point of view. He or she may be the love of your life, gentle as a teddy and calm as a still day on the Med, but due to media hype your dog is guilty without charge. Sad but true.

People can be ignorant, silly, and just downright rude about your choice of companion and the only way to change that is to become a Corso ambassador! It's not hard, it starts with two words: "good morning" You'd be amazed at how far a little consideration goes, and how much it can benefit your relationship with your dog. Take the time to look ten feet ahead on your walk - who's looking nervous? The mum with the pushchair and toddler in-tow? The old lady with her shopping basket? The Asian lady with her school kids? The young lad walking his terrier? What does it take to deal with their fear? Is it their problem/fault? No - there's a simple answer, so simple it's actually funny. "Sit" Make eye contact, sit your dog and give way with a smile and a greeting. You know the best part about this - the fantastic part? Your dog does not sense fear as they pass and therefore is less likely to react in a bad way. Brilliant - they're doing your training for you!

What are your dog's triggers? The man with the walking stick? The kid with the helium balloon? The workman having his sandwich? The 5 year old screaming and covered in ice cream? What does it take to deal with those triggers? Walk away. If you know your dog may be upset/overcome with a desire to eat a workman's sandwich (you can tell I'm writing from experience here huh?!) then move away with a smile and a joke.

Not all fear is media related either, most Asian, African, Caribbean and even European communities grow up with dogs as guard animals, vicious and there only to protect land. Did you know for example that it is unusual for a Muslim to touch a dog, and virtually unheard of for one to touch a wet dog? The Sikh word 'Sug' (dog) is associated with a group of martyrs and is considered a serious insult.

I have lived in Greece, on a remote island where large breeds are tethered for the winter in a yard whilst their owner goes to the mainland. The dog may be fed, it may not - in some areas of Europe it's 'just a dog' and disposable. No wonder they're vicious. No wonder some Europeans have a different view. Whilst it may appear on the surface a 'silly' reason to be scared of a dog, it's as

deeply ingrained in some religions as Christmas is in ours. You'd be amazed at the reactions of the Asian/African/Caribbean/European community in general to a calm dog owner; leaping out the way is replaced with a smile when they know you've taken the time to understand. Puppy classes are of course a good start, and nothing replaces good socialisation. But did you ever consider befriending a small-breed owner for your daily walk?

Yes your 12 week old may tower over his or her full-grown dog, but taking the time out to explain that you're doing this to teach your dog respect for its own size may earn you a walking partner who can help hone your 'NO!' skills along with someone to big you up at the park when the small breed owners are freaking out! Be aware of small breed owners, if you can't find one to walk with then try and befriend some to give a "good Morning" to. Nine times out of ten they're only afraid of your dog because it's BIG. Not because they think it's out of control - but that it may do damage during play or they may have had a negative experience in the past (guess whos job it is to change their mind?!) Control over your dog and a cheery attitude will protect you from the public at large. Putting your dog on the leash to greet a tiny tot with no recall and balls of steel goes a long way to stopping other owners transmitting fear to their dog.

My own dogs are now loved where they were once feared, greeted with a smile where they were once turned away from and tickled under the chin where they were once avoided. All due to my attitude, my attention to the people where I walk them.

Take time to socialise your dogs with kids even if you don't have any - most town centres now have one of those water features that kids love to run through screaming right? There's no better place to train your dog to be calm around squealing children special note - EXPLAIN to the parents of said kids why you are doing this, you are not a perv with a big dog!

You WILL encounter 'Breedism'. This is not your fault, nor the fault of your dog - the only thing to do is walk away. Your stress combined with the stress of the person in front of you will only lead to a bad situation - ask for FOCC cards to hand out to repeat offenders. Education is paramount.

Be good to your breed, the minute you own one you speak for all of us - make sure your words and actions give the right message.