

PDA – Puppy Display of Affection

by Jill Miller, CDPT
Mad City Dog Training



It's a fairly common sight – a dog lovingly licking his owner's face or hands. As humans we like to think that the dog is kissing us because they love us. While it has not been proven that dogs do **not** "kiss", it has not been proven that dogs **do** kiss.

In many cases licking is submissive behavior, especially if the dog is new to your home or is very young. The dog wants you to know that he knows you're in charge. The behavior may subside as the dog adjusts to the new home or matures.

To help a dog get used to a new home as quickly as possible, do obedience exercises with him. Personally I think that everyone should take a new dog to class whether it's a puppy or full grown. Even people with experience training dogs can benefit from having another pair of eyes to offer suggestions. Plus it seems like the experience of having a "date" with your dog and taking him to a place where you have to work together to tune out distractions can strengthen the bond between you and your dog. (<http://www.apdt.com> has a trainer search feature if you need help finding a trainer near you.)

If you do not take your dog to classes, then make sure that you are spending at least 10 minutes every day reviewing sits, downs, stays, attention, etc. By reviewing commands with your dog, you are letting him know what kind of behavior is acceptable to you. I also recommend requiring dogs to obey a command before they get valuable resources like human attention, food, treats, toys, or play time. My dog and I just finished playing fetch and before I threw the toy each time he had to obey a command. It didn't add much time to the game but it reviewed my expectations of him and he had fun showing off for me.

While you are working on the obedience aspect, you can also work on redirection. When the dog starts getting licky, send him to do something else. Always keep a toy nearby and redirect his attention from you to the toy. Or when he starts to lick you can ask him for a series of commands that make it impossible for him to lick. He probably cannot lick and shake at the same time, or lick and sit or roll over. Take advantage of that.



Some trainers advocate putting the unwanted behavior on cue and then rarely give it. To do this, encourage the dog to lick and allow him to do it once or twice. Then give him a command such as "enough", "stop", or even "dry up" and gently disengage yourself from the so he can no longer lick. The first few times he makes the connection and actually stops the licking before you have to move away, you can let him go back to licking just a little bit as a reward.

A final thing that you can try is to simply have zero tolerance for the behavior. This is what I have done with my dogs. I am one of the rare dog people who can not tolerate being licked by dogs. When my dogs started licking me, I simply sent them away or I myself stood up and walked away. My dogs now never lick me unless I really encourage them to, but they will lick anyone else who will hold still long enough. So be aware - the zero tolerance method will work well for you, but it will not necessarily stop the dog from licking others!

