

## “It’s OK Is Not OK!”

Dogs do not comprehend “It’s OK” the way humans do. How often have you observed a frightened or confused dog in training acting as though it wants to bolt from the situation, when some well meaning stranger says to the dog, “ It’s OK”?

If a 3-year old child is frightened by a storm, she will interpret “It’s OK” as consoling words. Dogs, lacking reasoning and verbal power of humans, interpret “It’s OK” as “That’s a good boy, that is the behavior I want. Every time it thunders I want to see you shiver, pee in the house, and hide”. Or, “running out of the ring, or refusing to do an exercise is exactly what I want you to do”.

Bob was kneeling next to a friend’s apprehensive dog to make him feel welcome in our training club building. A stranger walked up, and the dog cowered. The stranger said “It’s OK”. Bob explained that they just told the dog that was good behavior.

Personally, my Newfoundlands and American Staffordshire Terriers never had this shyness problem; but my Sheltie, Muffin does. Whenever I try to introduce her to an admiring stranger, she acts like a 3-year old child trying to hide behind me. My goal is to do obedience with her, and I can’t have her act that way when a stranger judge goes to examine her, so I pull her out of her hiding place, and force her to say “hello”. To my chagrin, at this point, the stranger will usually say “It’s OK”; telling Muffin that her reluctance is good. So, remind bystanders to watch what they say to dogs in training.



**ACADEMY FOUR PAWS**

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