

The idea of [My Doggie Says...](#) is that you can do a better job of nurturing your dog if you tune-in to the messages it sends. Here are some ways you can get past "sit" and "stay" and work on having a more meaningful relationship with your dog.

**Favorite Toys.** Do you know which are your dog's favorite toys? Surely, there are a few toys that it likes more than others. Jamie's favorite toy, until it got lost, was her little multi-colored basketball. Callie's obvious favorite is a small stuffed doggie. How do I know it's her favorite? It's the one she spends the most time with. She plays with other toys, but she keeps coming back to the stuffed doggie, especially around bedtime. Once you know your dog's favorite toys, make it a point to go pick one up once in a while and give it to your dog. Your doggie will know that you are paying attention, and it will appreciate your effort.

**Favorite things to do.** By observing your dog and spending time with it you should be able to figure out some things it really likes to do. Jamie's most favorite thing in the world was to swim and retrieve her "floppy" at Lake Arrowhead. Callie is just learning about swimming, but her favorite thing is playing soccer. She would play soccer for hours, and the thing I like most about it is that Callie invented her soccer game. We put the ball in her yard, but the ideal of playing "keep away" was entirely Callie's invention. We've just supported it. When you discover some things that your dog likes to do, make time to share the experience with your furry friend. It will be deeply appreciative.

**What is your dog asking you to do?** Try to read your dog's body language in order to understand what it might be asking for. One of my first realizations that Jamie was sending "messages" was her request "Please lift me up on your bed." She did this by standing beside me (at 2:00 in the morning), while I was sleeping and gently "wuufing." It took me a while to figure out what she was saying, but once I understood, Jamie was ecstatic. And, one day, Jamie asked to carry some newspapers home. It's not always easy to figure out these messages, but when you do, your dog will be very grateful that you "heard."

**What is your dog asking you for?** Jamie often stood by her puppy treat jar to ask for a puppy treat.



This was not real hard to figure out. The important thing was that I honored her request whenever possible. This reinforced her communication skills. Another of Jamie's favorite things was to chew up a champagne cork. Whenever she saw me opening a bottle of the bubbly stuff, she stood beside me and waited for the cork to pop out. I was glad to let her have this little pleasure, and I know it made her feel "heard."

**Does Your Dog Invite You to Play?** This is Callie's invitation to play soccer. How could I not accept an invitation like this?



Sometimes your dog invites you to play by presenting you with a toy. Don't ignore this polite request. Figure out how to respond. You could give the toy a toss and hope for a game of "fetch." Or you might take the toy and give it back, in hopes of starting a game of "give and take." Whatever you do, you will be communicating with your dog at a deeper level because you "heard" its invitation.

Here are some more ideas on how to improve your relationship with your dog. Most of these ideas are extracted from the award winning book "[My Doggie Says...: Messages from Jamie. How a dog named Jamie "talks" to her people.](#)"

**Deal with *your* dog.** Don't expect your dog to do things that other dogs do. Dogs are different. They have different personalities, and they are good at different things. There is a dog named Samantha in my neighborhood that is a great Frisbee dog. Throw a Frisbee and Samantha will catch it. If you think this is pretty neat, you can work with your dog and try to train it to be a Frisbee dog.

But it's important to discover what your dog likes to do and reinforce its talents. For example, I always thought it would be fun to play ball with a dog. But Jamie was not interested in playing ball. But she did love to retrieve her "Floppy" (like a cloth Frisbee) at Lake Arrowhead. On the other hand, our new puppy, Callie (now six months old), made it clear from the beginning that she likes to play with balls. Especially, her soccer ball. She initiates soccer games with me all the time. I make it a point to play soccer with Callie two or three times a week, and I know she appreciates it. (See photos in previous posts.)

During this last week, Callie has learned to swim, and, like Jamie, she loves to retrieve her Floppy from Lake Arrowhead.

**Find some activities that you both enjoy.** Jamie loved to share our early-morning, three-mile jog. When she saw us in our jogging clothes, she would get excited and go stand in the front hallway waiting to go jog. This was wonderful for both of us. The exercise helped both Jamie and me stay in good shape. And it helped Jamie knock off that "nervous edge" that doggies get when they don't get enough exercise. Think of it this way: you and your dog are losing weight together. "A tired dog is a happy dog!"

Callie's soccer is another example. I'm not really a soccer player, but I enjoy kicking the ball around, and I find it a fun way to interact with Callie. There's really no winner or loser; we're both having fun playing "keep away." And I know Callie loves it, because she keeps inviting me to play.

**Let your dog train you to do some things.** It's hard to know, sometimes, who is training whom. When Jamie was young, we trained her to "touch the bridge." There was a bridge about one-half way around our jogging route, and when we stopped for water, we would get Jamie to touch the wood railing of the bridge. We rewarded her with a puppy treat. But after a while, Jamie figured out that if she "touched the bridge," she would get a puppy treat. So she started doing it without being commanded to do it. So who's the trainer? And who's the trainee? We kept on giving her the puppy treat, because it seemed OK for Jamie to win this little game. Besides, it made her feel really good.

We let the same thing happen with Jamie's puppy treat jar. She knew where the puppy treats were stored in our kitchen. If I walked to the Kitchen, Jamie would stand by the puppy treat jar and look at me to make eye contact. The message was clear! "May I please have a puppy treat?" Like "touch the bridge" we let Jamie win this game most of the time, and I think it strengthened our bond.

There are times when your dog is totally dependent on you for its well-being. I believe that our dogs recognize this and are appreciative when we take good care of them.

There is no better opportunity to take care of your dog than when the weather is scorching hot. The ASPCA published an article titled "[The Heat is On: Summer Safety Tips for Pet Owners.](#)" This is especially appropriate, as we're having a monstrous heat wave. (See this Reuters article: "[West Coast Sizzles in Heat Wave.](#)" One suggestion is to exercise your dog earlier in the morning, while it's still cool.

It's important to give your dog plenty of water when you exercise. Jamie was very smart about hydrating before our jog, but we still gave her a water break at the halfway point. She loved getting a little water from her blue bowl.



Another thing you can do is find a place for your doggie to cool off. This is a stopping-off place on a jog in the San Bernardino mountains, near Lake Arrowhead.



If you let your dog have some leeway, you may notice that it is smart enough to walk or jog in the shade on hot days. Why not follow its lead? Jamie did this, and Callie seems to do it instinctively. If one side of the road is sunny and the other is shady, they always head for the shade. Also, they slow down a little in the shade and speed up a little if they can see that there is shade on the other side of a sunny stretch.

If all else fails, you can take your dog swimming or get it a fan. How would you feel these days if you were wearing a fur coat?



All photos are from the award winning book [My Doggie Says...: Messages from Jamie. How a dog named Jamie "talks" to her people.](#)

Dog = 46

Doggie = 8

Relationship = 2

Communication = 1

Listen = 0

Observe = 0

Body language = 1

Messages = 5

Request = 3

Personality = 0

Nature = 0

Nurture = 0

Meaningful = 1

Learn = 0

Understand = 1

Like = 10

Together = 1

Play = 14

Love = 5

Hear = 3