


# The Dirty Dozen

A handy guide to tackling taboo subjects with your friends about their dogs.

By Leslie Crane Rugg and Eva Saks

It's only human nature: even if we're blind to our own dog's problems, we can always see the problems in our friends' dogs. How do we find the words to broach these delicate matters? You can't say what's on your mind, but you've got to say something because you care about the canine in question... and you're a true friend. It's about health, not vanity. Your friends need to hear the truth; better they hear it from you. It's tough to take the plunge, but it's in the best interests of the dog. Do it for the Nipper. 

1

## YOU MEAN

"Your dog is too fat."

## DON'T SAY

"When are the puppies coming?"

## DO SAY

"Did you ever think of vertical stripes?"

**Obesity** is associated with thyroid disease, diabetes and cancer. It worsens joint diseases from arthritis to hip dysplasia to luxating patellae. Food is not love.

2

## YOU MEAN

"Your dog is too thin."

## DON'T SAY

"I didn't know dogs could be anorexic!"

## DO SAY

"Lucky dog—never gains an ounce."

**Thinness** could indicate the presence of internal parasites, from heartworm to tapeworm. Sudden weight loss can result from cancer, thyroid dysfunction and oral disease.

3

## YOU MEAN

"Your dog is dirty."

## DON'T SAY

"Cootie shot!"

## DO SAY

"Did your dog win the mud wrestling contest?"

**Ungroomed** coats can hide a variety of dangers, from fleas and ticks to foxtails and burrs. Mats and dirt can irritate the skin. The cleaner the dog, the fewer germs. Keep paws clean as herbicides used on grass are linked to certain cancers.

7

## YOU MEAN

"Your dog needs less exercise."

## DON'T SAY

"Are you trying to kill him?"

## DO SAY

"When do you fit in cuddle time?"

**Needs less exercise.** If aged or injured, your dog will not benefit from excessive workouts. Still recovering from surgery? Even if he's raring to go, he needs you to make the decision.

8

## YOU MEAN:

"Your dog needs some manners."

## DON'T SAY

"Was he socialized by Simon Cowell?"

## DO SAY

"My dog really enjoyed getting his Canine Good Citizen title."

**Needs manners.** You might think it's cute when your Newfie stands up and hugs you, but some guests could find it intimidating if not actually destabilizing. Obedience class teaches social graces while you bond with your dog. Small dogs need manners too; no one likes a yappy ankle-biter.

9

## YOU MEAN

"Your dog needs his nails cut."

## DON'T SAY

"Looks like Madame Chiang-Kai Shek."

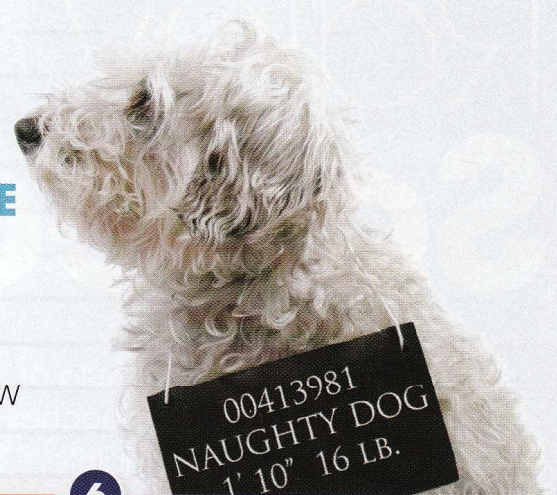
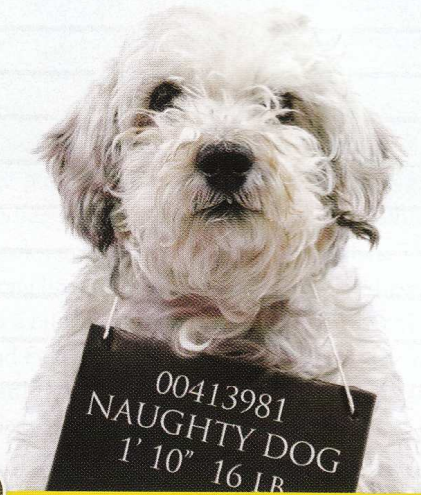
## DO SAY

"There's nothing more relaxing than a good mani-pedi."

**Nails** must be kept trimmed. (Polishing is optional.) Long nails can cripple a dog.

**“IF YOU WANT  
TO TELL PEOPLE  
THE TRUTH,  
YOU BETTER MAKE  
THEM LAUGH  
OR THEY’LL  
KILL YOU.”**

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW



**4**

**YOU MEAN**  
“You should change your dog’s food.”

**DON’T SAY**  
“Does he like the taste of carcinogens?”

**DO SAY**  
“Variety is the spice of life.”

**Dullness** may be a sign of nutritional deficiency. If a dog’s coat lacks sparkle or his behavior lacks spark, he might need a change of diet. Higher-quality food, vitamins and essential fatty acids give dogs a new leash on life!

**5**

**YOU MEAN**  
“Your dog has hot spots.”

**DON’T SAY**  
“Do you need a mop for that pus?”

**DO SAY**  
“My vet is board-certified in dermatology!”

**Hot Spots** reveal allergies to fleas, food and environment. They may also be due to shampoo not thoroughly rinsed out after a bath.

**6**

**YOU MEAN**  
“Your dog needs more exercise.”

**DON’T SAY**  
“Does he move?”

**DO SAY**  
“Your dog would be great at agility!”

**Needs more exercise.** Independent of being overweight, dogs needs conditioning, whether it’s fetching for fun, romping to let off steam or trotting to build a show physique. If you have a pool or swimming hole or ocean at your disposal, swim him. He won’t need water wings.

**10**

**YOU MEAN**  
“Your dog has an eye infection.”

**DON’T SAY**  
“Does your dog have a seeing eye person?”

**DO SAY**  
“Is that Day-Glo make-up?”

**Goopy Eyes** are different from tears. Green, grey and yellow gunk is often a sign of infection requiring veterinary attention. Note that tear stains suggest allergy or tear duct impairment.

**11**

**YOU MEAN**  
“Your dog has dental issues.”

**DON’T SAY**  
“Your pup reminds me of Austin Powers.”

**DO SAY**  
“Raw feeders call bones Nature’s Toothbrush!”

**Teeth** must be kept clean. Dental problems can lead to heart failure, kidney malfunction and liver disease. Bad breath is a serious warning sign.

**12**

**YOU MEAN**  
“Your dog has gas.”

**DON’T SAY**  
“Phew! He sure can clear a room!”

**DO SAY**  
“I like baked beans, too.”

**Gas** reveals gastrointestinal problems and may be a warning sign of bloat, which can be fatal. Simethicone products, like Gas-X, can reduce simple flatulence.