How to Choose a Dog Trainer

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Finding a good trainer for your dog or puppy will make a huge difference in how you and your pet relate to each other for the life of your pet. Attend a class or two before you get a puppy and register for class. This allows you the opportunity to see how the instructor teaches.

Points to consider when choosing a trainer

Reputation: You may find a trainer by asking your veterinarian, animal shelter, family members, or friends whom they recommend. Talk to people who have had their pets in the trainer's classes. Ask the trainer for references.

Experience and knowledge

Find out how long the person has been training dogs.

- Is the trainer familiar with the Canine Good Citizen Program and are they qualified as an evaluator?
- What education and continuing education has the trainer had?
- Is the trainer affiliated with any dog training or behavior associations?

Choose a trainer that has trained dogs that surpasses what you would like to do with your dog. See how the trainer's dogs behave. If the trainer's dogs are not under control, are jumping on people, and are barking, the trainer is not going to be able to show you how to teach your dog to not jump on people or bark. You will need to have an idea of what you want to accomplish with your dog. Do you want a well-mannered housedog, a field dog, a dog you can show in the obedience ring, or a dog with whom you can do search and rescue work? Finding a trainer that trains dogs that meet your expectations will make the training process that much easier.

Communication skills

- Can the trainer communicate well with both the people and the dogs?
- Does the trainer answer questions in terms you can understand?
- Does the trainer provide written handouts?

Methods: If you are uncomfortable asking questions or do not like the instructor's methods, find another trainer. Training methods vary. Your dog may not respond to one method, but respond very well to another. If your dog does not seem to respond to the method the trainer uses, the trainer should be willing to show other methods for teaching your dog. The trainer should use positive reinforcement for correct behavior.

Style: Anyone training dogs needs to have a sense of humor. The people and dogs in the class should be enjoying it. It should be obvious to you that the trainer likes working with people and dogs.

Class structure

- What is the class size?
- Do people and dogs receive some individual attention?
- Is there enough room for all the people and dogs to participate in all of the activities?
- Are all family members encouraged to participate, especially in the puppy classes?
- Must all dogs have proof of vaccination before starting the class?

Common types of dog classes

Puppy classes: These classes are for puppies about 2-5 months old. The socialization under controlled situations is the absolute best thing you can do for your puppy. In addition to socialization, topics covered include housebreaking, socializing, chewing, biting, digging, and barking. You are taught how to teach the dog. Walking on a leash without pulling; sitting, and coming are basics that are covered in class.

Many people do not think they need to take their puppy to classes because they have other dogs for socialization or they have trained other dogs and feel they know how to train this one. The controlled social situation of classes where the puppy is exposed to new people, dogs, and places while being

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asked to respond to commands is very difficult to replicate in a home setting. Classes are not just for teaching the puppy to respond to commands but to respond to commands while other dogs and people are trying to distract him. The socialization aspect of classes cannot be replaced especially for the 2 to 4 month-old puppy. This socialization and training is worth the effort. Remember, the most common reason for healthy dogs to be put to sleep or relinquished to the animal shelters is poor behavior.

Basic obedience classes: These classes are for dogs older than about 5 months of age. They reinforce what was started in puppy classes and continue on to include heel, sit, stay, down, and come. The American Kennel Club (AKC) Canine Good Citizen (CGC) Program is a program designed to reward dogs who have good manners at home and in the community. Dogs that graduate from basic obedience classes should be able to pass the 10-item test. Dogs do not need to be AKC registered to test.

Advanced obedience classes: These classes work on response time and finesse. They may be geared to those who wish to show in obedience competitions.

Therapy dog training: Therapy Dog International (TDI) is a volunteer group organized to provide qualified handlers and their Therapy Dogs for visitations to institutions, facilities, and any other place where Therapy Dogs are needed. The goal is to provide comfort and companionship by sharing the dog with patients in hospitals, nursing homes, and other facilities where the Therapy Dog is needed. Dogs do not need to be AKC registered to participate.

Conformation classes: These classes are for those who wish to show in the breed ring where the dog is judged on its looks and the way it moves.

Agility classes: These classes are for those who want to have fun with their dog. Dogs are taught how to go over, under, and through various obstacles. It is like taking your dog to a playground. This class can be for fun or to prepare for competition in agility trials.

Sporting and field dog classes: Training groups are available in most areas of the country for those who wish to teach their dogs to perform field work. Groups usually focus on one type of field event such as retrieving or pointing.

Search and Rescue (SAR): Persons who are interested in training their dogs to do search and rescue often join a SAR group which is a made up of a group of volunteers. The group trains the dogs to search and find missing people who may be dead or alive. The dogs work at various training levels including searching in woods, in the water from a boat, and in buildings damaged from natural disasters such as earthquakes or terrorism.

These are just some of the ways you can spend time with your dog. The benefits of attending training classes with your dog include having a well-mannered dog that is invited to come with when you visit family and friends. Other types of classes may be available in your community. Contact several trainers and veterinary clinics for more information. The AKC web site, www.akc.org/index.html, has more information regarding competing with purebred dogs.

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