

# Training Your Dog: What You Have to Know Before Starting To Train Your Dog

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# Training Your Dog: What You Have to Know Before Starting To Train Your Dog

## Dog Training - The Basics

Though dog-human interaction goes back thousands of years, communication between the two is still sometimes rough. The human half of the pair is usually the smarter party, but watching the usual training sessions one can have legitimate reason to wonder.

Dogs understand and respond at roughly the mental level of a human two-year-old, but there the similarity ends. Their senses operate differently - their color vision has a different response pattern to reds and greens, for example, and obviously their noses are infinitely more sensitive - and their minds process information differently as well. Anyone training dogs has to take this into account in order to avoid human frustration and canine misbehavior.

Dogs are by nature pack animals. Descendant from wolves - where even the 'lone wolf' is an anomaly - they're social and function best with active interplay and within a strict hierarchy.

So, set aside half-an-hour per day, an hour would be better, for at least the first few months of training. Start as young as possible. Four weeks is not too early with some breeds, provided one doesn't expect too much.

Elimination ('potty') training details we leave for elsewhere, but all training follows similar guidelines.

Establish dominance early on. Dogs have a hierarchy - there are alpha dogs, beta dogs, and on down to the omega. For a sane household, and a well-adjusted dog, the human (whether male or female) must always be the alpha male of the pack.

This will be easier or more difficult depending on breed and even with individual dogs. Like humans, some are simply more assertive than others. Leashes, collars, commands and other training aids are all highly useful but most important is attitude. Never let your dog be the boss.

That guideline doesn't imply you must enforce your dominance with physical force. Sometimes, used appropriately, that will be necessary. Usually, simply being firm and willing to wait for compliance will be enough.

For many, placing them on their backs when young and placing a firm hand in the middle of the chest until they lower their paws - a sign of submission - will be enough. With some, reinforcing this by putting your face close to theirs, emulating dominant dog behavior, can help.

Start on a short leash to restrain the dog's natural tendency to run and scamper. Allow plenty of time for free running behavior, essential to dog health, but that's before or after training, not during. At least, not at first.

Start simply by choosing short, clear commands that sound distinctly different: sit, stay, down, come. Use a firm, but not harsh voice. You're in charge, but not angry. Avoid double-word commands like 'sit down' or 'stay down'. These sound too much alike and quickly confuse the dog.

Accompany each verbal command with the same tone, look and hand gesture. Eventually these can separate, but at first it's essential to provide the simplest, most consistent form of communication.

Just like two-year old humans, dogs have limited capacity for grasping the subtleties of language. Assist their understanding by rigid consistency. Don't use a single command word to mean more than one thing. 'Down' can mean 'don't jump on me or anyone else', or it can mean 'get on your stomach', but it has to mean one thing only.

Be clear, be patient and be committed and the result will be a dog who trusts and listens to you. And that makes it worth the effort.

## **The Best Training Diet**

Nothing is more essential to good training than good health. And the foundation of good health is a good diet.

Depending on your budget you may or may not be able to feed your dog a larger proportion of fresh meat, but at least be prepared to spend enough for a good dry food. Here are a few things to look for...

All dog foods are labeled with the ingredients in order by proportion. That is, the material that forms the largest percentage is listed first, followed by the second and then others.

One of the attributes that makes cheap dog food less preferable is the high percentage of 'waste' animal parts. When you see 'by products' on the label, it's better to avoid these brands. If it does appear on higher quality dog food, which is rare, it will be listed near the bottom indicating a small proportion.

Those 'by products' consist of parts that were not considered usable for human consumption. That fact doesn't by itself make the product dangerous, but the lower quality will have a long term effect on coats, muscles and bones, and overall health.

Just as one indicator, dogs with healthy coats (particularly, long-haired breeds) will look shinier and shed less; assuming proper bathing and brushing habits, of course.

Some experts put the proper ratio of meat, vegetables and starch at about roughly 40%, 30%, 30% respectively.

Common meats used are chicken, lamb and beef. These provide readily digestible sources of protein - essential to healthy coats, muscles, etc.

Vegetables provide minerals and vitamins that help produce proper hormone and enzyme types and amounts, as well as compounds for good bone health and other functions. Carrots and squash, for example are both excellent for almost all dogs.

The starch content is often provided by brown or white rice. Either is an excellent source of carbohydrates. These compounds are broken down in the body to form the basis for energy and cell repair.

As with any food substance, some dogs have special conditions that make special diets necessary. Many Golden Retrievers, for example, are sensitive to wheat products. Corn meal is hard to digest for some dogs.

Look for these on the label and discuss with your vet whether it's necessary to avoid them. Some indicators are soft stools, excessive scratching and frequent gas.

Some dogs will find dry dog food more enjoyable if prepared with a little water and microwaved for about 30 seconds. Feed dry at least occasionally, though, to help scrub teeth and gums.

Needless to say, go easy on the treats. Even quality treats tend to be high in fat content - one of the reasons the dogs enjoy them so much. One or two per day isn't harmful, but go for the quality brands.

The price differential for good food is sometimes considerable - with higher quality dog food often twice the cost. But considering the effects on health you'll likely make up for it in lower vet bills, or at least a healthier dog.

The shine of the coat, the clarity of the eyes and other less obvious indicators will show in the long run. And, in the final analysis, the health of your dog is priceless.

## **Finding a Trainer**

Many people don't have the time, energy or patience to devote to dog training. Few other activities require as much, if the result is to be a safe, well-adjusted dog and a happy human. For some, the answer is to outsource the effort to a professional trainer.

As in any profession, quality and cost vary. And, like many professions - especially those involving human-animal interactions - training philosophies vary considerably. So, you already have some parameters to guide your selection.

Examine your budget and your needs. Depending on where you live, training can run anywhere from free - often supplied on a weekly basis by volunteers to parks or shelters - to \$100 or

more per session. What constitutes a reasonable fee will vary depending on geography, trainer experience, length of program and your goals.

Examine your schedule. Some training programs are weekly, others more often. You may have to leave the dog and pick it up later. Or, more likely, you may join a program where the training involves you directly. Most will suggest that you spend some time training the dog every day, whether at home or at the trainer's facility.

Examine your commitment. Dogs, especially early in training, need regular, large blocks of time and attention in order to learn. An hour a day is not at all unusual.

In some cases, 'boot camp' training programs are preferred. The dog goes away to a special facility for up to several weeks. The training is regular, long and intensive. Don't be concerned for the dog. They love that! Near the end, you'll usually have to participate in order to 'transfer' the obedience from trainer to you.

But the results are often amazing. Dogs who 'graduate', even when not special service dogs, are disciplined and eager to follow instructions. Yet, paradoxically, these dogs show no signs of being repressed. They're happy and play with great enthusiasm.

Examine your goals. You may want a dog who can be entered in shows, or you may just want them not to chew on the couch or chase the cat. In either case, regular training is required. How much and what kind will vary with breed and individual temperament.

Some dogs are fearful, either through being mistreated or from a natural tendency toward submission. Some are too assertive, again through abuse or natural striving for alpha (pack leader) status. What training you select will depend on how you want to influence them and what attributes they have you want to shape.

Whatever your goals, budget or commitment you want a trainer who exhibits massive patience and boundless energy, not to mention a deep love for dogs. Most have these characteristics in spades.

Beyond those basics, you'll want a trainer whose philosophy makes sense to you and matches your goals. Some insist that dog training is more about training the owner than the dog - and there's some truth to that in some cases. Some are lenient and friendly, leaning toward the 'touchy-feely' style. Others lean more toward police or military style training. And many lie between these two extremes.

It's unlikely that one training style suits all, but neither is it entirely subjective. Even where there are disputes there are common principles that most will agree on. Patience, persistence, consistency and the need for the human to lead are only a few of these.

Ask for recommendations from those you trust and don't hesitate to shop around. Be prepared to change trainers once or twice to find one suitable for your needs. Be careful, though, not to change on a whim. Dogs need consistency and a regular environment in order to absorb what's being taught. Good luck and good hunting!

## **Training the Trainer**

Dog training philosophies vary as much as dogs and trainers do. Most professionals agree, however, that a large part of training dogs consists of training the trainers.

Whether those trainers are pet owners or professionals they need many of the same attributes. Most dogs are neither stupid nor intelligent in the same way humans are. But whatever their natural aptitude they require and benefit from consistency, repetition and a patient style of guidance.

Dog trainers need to have or develop an attitude of restraint, calm and focus. Not everyone has, nor can acquire, the patience to carry out a training regime that takes weeks to months or longer. Training is sometimes as short as an hour per day, often as long as all day, broken up into shorter segments. Taking up that effort is a task not all are equipped to master.

Trainers need to be patient, firm and fair not only with dogs but also with their owners. Honest answers to legitimate questions breeds the respect essential to successful training. A willingness to explain in clear, patient terms what training will involve and to set out the goals of training is vital.

Variations in breeds, individual temperament and owners themselves makes guaranteeing results impossible. But before training begins, trainers need to communicate answers to questions owners may not know enough even to ask. Realism is the only way to properly set expectations.

Dog trainers need to learn a substantial amount about canine veterinary medicine. While they make no pretense to be vets, they need to recognize the external possible signs of hip dysplasia, bacterial infections, diabetes and other diseases and conditions. Training can only proceed with a healthy dog.

Trainers need to learn safety procedures, both for the sake of the dog and the trainer. Even friendly, well-behaved dogs can become excited during play. Dogs are emotional creatures and once their hormones begin to flare, they often take several minutes at best to calm down again.

During those periods of excitement, teeth are often bared and the dog is moving around erratically. It's easy for a trainer's hand to get in the path, or for the dog to injure itself over a leash or training block.

Trainers have to develop acute powers of observation and communication. Trainers aren't merely dog lovers. Though, they are almost always that. They're individuals who have or acquire the ability to carefully observe dog behavior, even subtle cues and clues. That observation has to be understood to the point that reacting becomes automatic.

Dogs will often signal when they are about to bolt, or to vomit grass, or exhibit a slew of other behaviors. A good trainer has a keen eye and the knowledge of how to use those observations to maximize the effectiveness of training.

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers in the U.S. provides guidelines and training for trainers that help keep trainers and owners satisfied with the results. Not all professional dog trainers are members, and not being a member doesn't mean a professional is unqualified. Nevertheless, the organization is a good place to start to learn more about dog trainers and their methods.

The APDT can be contacted by mail, phone, or at their website.

Website:

<http://www.apdt.com/>

Phone:

1-800-PET-DOGS

(1-800-738-3647)

Address:

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers

150 Executive Center Drive Box 35

Greenville, SC 29615

## **Dog Training Styles - Part I**

Contrary to popular belief, there are not as many training styles as there are trainers. Despite individual differences, people handling dogs fall into clearly recognizable categories. And no matter your individual style or that of your dog, there remain certain truisms.

### **The Too-Easily Frustrated**

No activity apart from human childrearing requires as much patience as developing cooperative behavior in a dog. And most individuals don't spontaneously possess that much. So, along with training the dog, self-training is usually necessary.

Be prepared to invest the time daily, at least half an hour but preferably an hour, to developing the desired behavior in your companion. And when you feel you're at your limit of patience, whether at 10 minutes or an hour, end the session.

Strive to lengthen that 'time to boiling point' a little each day. Remind yourself you are dealing with a dog. Even the most easily trained breeds or individual dogs understand at roughly the level of an average two-year old human. Of course, there are those rare exceptions.

### **The Too-Ready to Surrender**

Dogs by nature are pack animals that develop in a hierarchical social structure. There are alphas (leaders) and omegas (passive, sometimes fearful) and those in the middle. For any training program to succeed it's essential that the human (male or female) be the alpha male of

the pack. You are training the dog, not the reverse. Though it can understandably feel like the latter, sometimes!

Be firm, but not harsh. Have the patience not only to avoid the anger prompted by frustration at failure to obey, but to persist. Don't surrender your authority. Training a dog to obey isn't for the purpose of ego-gratification or feeling superior. The benefits are increased safety for your dog, your children and neighbors, and a well-adjusted companion.

This won't always be easy - some dogs are natural alphas. But even in purely wild packs that role can and does change among individuals, when the more assertive individual insists on taking it. Be consistent, don't give up, and your dog will follow your instructions.

### **The Unreasonable**

Even the best-trained dogs will not always do what you want when you want. Expecting a dog to too-quickly understand a new command or to unflinchingly remember a previously learned one is a recipe for frustration. Dogs' memories work very differently from humans, even two-year-old humans. Take the time to learn your individual dog's capacity and limitations.

Some breeds are inherently more easily trained, and individuals vary. Some are more naturally energetic (terriers, retrievers, dalmatians) and some more low-key (basset hounds, collies). Age obviously makes a difference. Ten-week old puppies will invariably display less attention than a three-year old dog.

Work with your dog's nature, not against it. Harsh tones at the least provocation, strong physical punishment for less-than-instant obedience, and other tactics are self-defeating. The goal is to build trust so the alpha (you) will be obeyed by preference, not fear.

### **Dog Training Styles - Part II**

Training styles differ, but some traditional techniques have proven their worth.

Training styles are sometimes divided into those that use both positive and negative reinforcement, or rewards and punishment and those that rely solely on rewards. Using the word 'punishment' naturally turns off many who want to treat their companion with care. Substitute the word with 'discouragements' and you have the more accurate sense.

Rewards run the gamut from praise - which should be lavish and frequent when the dog exhibits a desired behavior - to petting and belly rubs or back scratches, to treats. All these are useful for rewarding learned behavior.

But when using treats, don't go overboard. High in calories and packed with flavor, dogs will often eat as many treats as are offered. Dogs prone to weight gain can have too many, and too many treats can produce fussy eaters when regular food is served. The goal is to eventually elicit the behavior solely from verbal commands and hand signals.

Leash and collar training are essential, at least for a time, for almost every breed and individual. Like young humans, dogs have a natural desire to do what they want when they wish. Self-restraint doesn't develop spontaneously.

When training a 'sit', a short and gentle pull on the leash can encourage slow-learners or the reluctant to comply. Pull back, not up. But not hard, you don't want to bruise a throat. When training to exit - not jet - the house a restraint is imperative, especially if something interesting (like a rabbit or cat) just zoomed by.

Discouraging unwanted behavior also involves a large variety of techniques, some requiring considerable creativity. Stopping plant chewing, for example, can often be accomplished with a little cayenne pepper paste applied to the leaves. Harmless to most plants, be sure to check with your gardening expert before applying.

But the same technique can't be used for, say, shoe or furniture chewing. Most dogs aren't leashed inside the house, so that tool isn't available either. Creativity and experimentation is called for. Sometimes it's necessary to substitute with rawhide bones, cotton chew balls, ropes and other more esoteric objects.

Wrapping an old cotton-shirt around a 'peanut butter bone' - a pigskin or rawhide toy suffused with peanut butter odor - has rescued me more than once. But those who keep laundry within dog's reach won't want to encourage chewing on t-shirts.

Common sense will help individuals avoid bad training techniques.

If you were slapped with a newspaper when you vomited on the rug, would you regard that as an appropriate response? Dogs are not humans, but they are aware and have some reasoning capacity. Physical punishment or loud, harsh words for unavoidable accidents injures trust and creates fearful dogs. Fear is counter-productive, except in extreme emergencies, where the dog or a person is in danger.

Dogs can be trained to do amazing things. One well-known woman has a dance routine with her companion that goes on for several minutes. Few would have said it was possible before she spent the years of attention needed to create that range of behaviors.

Find a style that generates trust and attention, that leads a dog to want to cooperate, and you've reached an important goal: leading your willing 'pack'.

## **The Pros and Cons of Control Tools**

Sometimes the distinction between training and control is too easily lost. Using commands and hand gestures, with leashes or treats, to solicit desired behavior is training. Using choke or 'no-bark' collars, electronic fences and similar devices is for control.

Control isn't necessarily a bad thing. Dogs naturally have and seek a social hierarchy in which one is the alpha (leader) and in any human-dog pair the human has to take that role. The alternative is property destruction, unsafe conditions for dogs and humans, human frustration and a maladjusted dog.

Choke collars were invented to assist in gaining control. Dogs, like humans, are individuals. Some are naturally more assertive or slower to learn. For ones that don't respond to a normal leather or nylon collar, a metal choke collar can provide extra discouragement from pulling and leaping.

The potential downside is that, used improperly - all too easy to do - they can be counter-productive and even dangerous. Choke collars fit only one way and when fitted should allow from one to three fingers gap between the neck and the collar. Three for larger dogs, one for smaller. Generally a collar two inches longer than the neck circumference will do.

Used improperly, though, choke collars can pinch the skin - producing hot spots that scratching will make worse. They can also accidentally compress the trachea. An instantaneous pull-and-release isn't harmful, though by design produces discomfort, but for dogs that tend to pull against the leash this movement is difficult to do. Generally not recommended, especially for smaller dogs.

Prong collars are less dangerous than they appear, but - in this trainer's view - have almost no positive characteristics. The only good aspect of the design is their limited diameter - they can only close down so far. However, an animal with such a strong tendency to pull that prongs look attractive needs more than a quick fix consisting of choking and poking. That animal needs committed attention and behavior modification training.

Halter collars, which wrap around the neck and the muzzle, but don't prevent panting or impair drinking can give extra control. The downside is, since they don't restrict biting or grasping, half their potential value is gone. An ordinary leash and collar, or even a chest halter might be preferable.

'No-bark' collars can sometimes help with those animals that persist in barking long after the initial impetus is gone. Barking is a natural response to potential threats and is also used to attract attention when one becomes separated from the pack. But, for reasons not well understood, some individuals continue barking for long periods or at the slightest provocation.

Electronic collars that discourage barking come in two types: noise and shock. Noise collars produce a short, unpleasant sound that distracts and tends to discourage continued barking.

Shock collars generate a short but painful electric shock that can be repeated and lengthy during prolonged or persistent barking. Objective tests of their effectiveness show varied results, though. As with prong collars, any dog needing one would benefit more from careful, professional help.

Sometimes quick fixes are tempting and useful... until they become substitutes for more beneficial (both to trainer and dog) long-term training. Taking the time to learn to get your

dog's attention and compliance without excessive reliance on control devices is preferred. The results are saner trainers and happier dogs.

## **Training Devices, Tools Not Substitutes**

The creativity of trainers and those who supply them with additional tools is never-ending. To the new or casual trainer there appears a dizzying array of devices. Though many are useful, they shouldn't be viewed as substitutes for training knowledge.

Before using any of the tools discussed below, be sure your dog is in good health. Even the gentlest of collars or training regimes can do harm if the dog has a skin sore or twisted dew claw.

### **Clickers**

An excellent attention-getting device, the clicker is a palm-sized, hand-held plastic and metal unit which emits a loud 'click-clack' noise when pressed and released. It can save a lot of wear on the trainer's voice and is distinctive and readily audible, even against common background noise.

The trainer can use a clicker to draw the attention of a distracted dog. It's more commonly used, though, as a reward or 'begin' sound when the animal exhibits desired behavior or to start a behavior.

### **Leashes and Collars**

The variety of leashes available is astounding, running the gamut from two-foot control leashes, usually of nylon or leather, to the 30-foot extendable-retractable nylon cord type.

For near work, such as training 'sit', 'stay' (for example, 'don't run after the cat' or 'don't go out the door before me') the two to four foot leash is an excellent tool. The extendable leash is useful only by trainers who want to obey their dog. The human (whether male or female) should always be the 'alpha male' of the pack and the alpha always leads.

Collars come in a variety of buckle, snap, nylon, leather combinations. Provided the snaps and nylon are good quality they can be fully strong enough for even large dogs. They should be adjusted carefully, though, so they don't slip off easily when the dog moves a head toward the ground and away to escape.

This trainer is adamantly opposed to spike collars - which can easily damage a smaller dog and tend to engender fear even in larger ones. Similarly, choke collars are discouraged. Dogs have very strong neck muscles, but a sharp tug on the front of the throat can bruise or even collapse a trachea. Also, too often choke collars are put on backwards (an easy mistake to make), which makes them counter-productive and dangerous.

## **Vests**

Similar to leashes, chest halter leashes and even full vests can help to strengthen the trainers advantage while avoiding excessive pressure on the dog's throat.

The potential downside is that the animal experiences no discomfort from pulling, so this limits training completely to positive re-enforcement. Originally designed to be used with seeing-eye and other aid dogs, the chest-halter can encourage pulling - the opposite of the usual goal.

Nevertheless, for those who need extra control over a strong dog or when regular collars and leashes won't serve they're valuable.

## **Muzzles**

For short-term barking and biting control muzzles may sometimes be helpful or even necessary. The downside to using one is the dog never learns through other means to suppress barking. The muzzle becomes a substitute for the more difficult, long-term solution of obeying 'no-bark' commands.

There are dozens of other dog-related items: no-bark collars, electric fences, chemical sprays, head collars, etc. But these are as much control devices as training tools.

And, of course, there are the training tools that remain perpetual and highly effective favorites: love and respect. Treat your dog as you would a loving companion and it will be much easier to produce desired behavior.

## **Crate Training Pros and Cons**

Debate continues unabated about whether or not crate training dogs is healthy or harmful.

'Crating' involves placing a pet in a cage, usually plastic or metal of roughly the size of the dog, for a period of time during the day or night.

Proponents argue that crating gives the dog a sense of 'property', a place it can call its own. In this little home within the home, the dog feels safe surrounded by familiar smells and objects. Here, the dog can retreat from fearful noises or boisterous children.

Those who favor crate training assert that potty training is much easier when combined with use of a crate. Dogs, they say, will naturally avoid soiling their 'den' and 'hold it' until they're released to go outside.

Opponents counter that locking the dog into a cage barely large enough to turn around in suppresses its natural desire to roam. It removes the dog's ability to explore its environment at will and to soak up stimulating sights and smells.

Those against the use of crates point to the frequent instances when puppies will play in their own waste and simply soil themselves worse. Locking the dog away, they say, is more for the convenience of the owner than the well-being of the dog.

As with any debate of this kind, there are no doubt good and bad points on both sides. Objective studies on the issue are sparse and equally divided. Provided certain 'rules' are observed, there's probably no harm, and possibly some good, to be had from crate training.

Even proponents recognize that excessive lengths of forced crate time is bad for the dog. Any dog locked up in a small space is not getting needed exercise and may be restrained from eliminating for longer than is healthy. So, keep the crate time to no more than two hours maximum.

Opponents worry that crated dogs can injure themselves through a natural desire to escape or rowdiness inside the cage. Make sure that the collar won't snag. Check to ensure there are no sharp edges on the crate, and that construction is strong enough to withstand the dog's normal jostling and pushing on the walls. Above all, make sure it can't tip over.

Advocates assert that crate trained animals will do better on car, train or plane trips. They're used to the confinement and they have a familiar-smelling environment with them during a time of stress. For owners who have to take their pets on long trips, there may be some value in this view.

Critics suggest that (except in cases of permanent re-location) it's best to leave pets at home. Apart from short trips to the grocery store or vet or to a neighbor's house, animals fare better in familiar territory. But, if you must take them, be especially careful to do so in a well-constructed crate. Make sure no objects can fall into, not just out of, the cage.

Though the debate isn't likely to be settled anytime soon, exercising common sense is the best way to judge the actual net effect - good or bad - on your particular pet. Try leaving the door open after a few weeks of training and see whether they seek or avoid the crate. Let the dog weigh in on the question.

## **Housebreaking Your Puppy**

No training is more basic for pet owners than that first important lesson: Do it outside!

Teaching your pet to eliminate outside the home, not in it, usually starts between six and eight weeks of age. Dogs as young as four weeks have been started on the program, but at that age few have the muscular control to succeed.

Like any dog training regimen, trainer patience is as important as the dog's temperament. 'Sit', 'stay' and other behaviors can often be learned in a few days. 'Potty' training typically takes weeks - sometimes as short as two, often a month or more.

As with other learned behaviors, it helps to watch for signs of the desired actions and enforce and direct them with a voice command followed by praise. In this case that technique works even more to the trainer's advantage, since all dogs will naturally eliminate. The trick is to get them to do it when and where you want!

Watch for circling or squatting, then pick up the pup, say 'outside' and dash outside. The puppy may circle some more, but will often squat immediately. As it begins, say 'Go potty' (or some other unique phrase) in a clear, firm (but not angry) voice. Wait until it's finished and praise lavishly.

You won't always be able to catch the puppy about to begin, but don't become angry or impatient when the dog eliminates indoors. It takes time for the dog to learn to tell you it's time to 'go outside'. It also takes time for the muscles needed to control bladder and bowels to develop.

Young dogs need to eliminate every 2-3 hours, on average. If you haven't spotted pre-elimination behavior within that time, take the dog outside anyway. Issue the command 'Go potty' and wait. At first, usually, the dog will have no clue what you want.

Again, even when outside, it helps to wait and watch for the desired behavior then issue the command. That helps the dog associate the command with the behavior. If the dog hasn't gone after a few minutes and a few 'Go potty' commands, take it back inside for an hour. Of course, if you spot the pre-elimination behavior in less time, go outside again immediately.

Dogs have a surprising ability to quickly learn what their 'alpha' (the leader of the pack) wants. This is almost always accomplished by associating a verbal command with behavior, followed by praise. Punishment is usually counter-productive, and nowhere more so than in waste elimination training. Never rub a dog's nose in waste.

Paper and/or crate training is preferred by some. A pup can be trained to go on a newspaper, or on one of the chemically treated pads designed for the purpose. Some small breeds that live all day in the home may not need to go outside at all.

The technique has a couple of downsides however. Unlike cats, dogs will rarely go in a perfumed litter box. Newspapers (even with the top layer removed after the dog goes) will eventually create an unpleasant smell in the house.

Also, long before the odor becomes unattractive to humans, dogs can smell their own distinctive aroma. They don't find it unattractive - quite the opposite. And that's the problem.

Dogs that are paper trained will often prefer to eliminate indoors. Sometimes they'll miss the paper by only an inch, creating a mess to clean up.

Once the odor is in the carpet, the dog will often seek that spot out as its proper 'place to go'. This makes training the dog to eliminate outside even more difficult. Best to suffer a few accidents than to create a hard-to-overcome habit.

Patience, praise and consistency are the keys to any dog training. Elimination training is the first test for you and your dog.

## **How To Stop Chewing**

A dog's jaw muscles are among his strongest. An average-sized Golden Retriever can untie the knot in a rawhide bone (or just chew it off) in minutes. If only they'd stick to those!

The tendency to chew will vary from one breed - and one individual - to another. But most dogs will chew on objects in and around the house. Keeping them focused on objects intended for them is a continuing challenge.

Younger dogs, puppies in particular, will usually have a greater tendency to chew and less discrimination about what they choose. But even young puppies can be discouraged from grabbing things the owner would prefer to keep whole.

First, as always, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Keep shoes, laundry (socks, t-shirts, etc), where dogs can't get them. Keep children's toys separated from the dog's. Which implies that the dog has some. So...

Keep plenty of attractive toys on hand, whether indoors or out, for Fido to chew on. Rawhide bones are attractive to some dogs, others prefer hard rubber or special plastic 'dental' bones. With some exceptions, real bones are usually not a good idea. Large beef bones are okay, but chicken and pork can easily splinter and lead to injury.

Fortunately, all kinds of special toys are available. Some even have hollow interiors suitable for holding treats. The dog usually has to struggle a bit to get at the treat in the center. That's the whole idea. It keeps them occupied and gives them a good mental and physical workout striving to access the reward.

A sharp tone or a mild tap for grabbing an unsuitable object, such as a shoe or sock, is useful and appropriate. Yelling or harsh physical punishment is counter-productive. It's better for both dog and 'alpha' (the leader of the pack - you) to vent that frustration elsewhere. Easier said than done the tenth time you've scolded the dog, but necessary for the mental well-being of both parties.

To practice developing specific habits, take some time (daily, if necessary and possible) to leash the dog and present an inappropriate object. If the dog moves toward it, jerk the leash sideways quickly and firmly and give a loud 'No!'.

Be sure to jerk sideways, not back. A dog's neck muscles are very strong, but throats can be too easily bruised. The movement is to inform, not to punish.

Outside, if the dog has a tendency to chew on plants, fences, etc, you can take advantage of some commercial mixtures or home recipes to discourage the behavior. A little cayenne pepper

paste smeared on the leaves of 'attractive' plants can often eliminate chewing in one lesson. Some commercial preparations contain 'bitter apple', which discourages some dogs.

As with any dog training, patience, persistence and consistency are the keys to success. Suppressing chewing is often one of the more challenging since you're training the dog to NOT do something, rather than to DO something.

Redirection to acceptable objects is your best bet, since you can't eliminate the instinct. Stay alert and keep a cool head - even when they've just chewed a hole in that new carpet. That's expensive and annoying, but carpet can be replaced. Your relationship with your pet can't.

## **Dealing with Jumping**

Most dogs will display a tendency to jump on people at times - how often will vary with breed and by individual. One theory suggests that dogs are trying to get close to the person's face - not to attack, but to interact. Other dogs, especially of the same breed, have faces close to their level and the dog will use its nose and eyes to explore.

So, one way to deal with jumping is to give them no need to reach. Kneel down and interact with the dog at its level. Let it explore your face in a safe way, while keeping an eye out for excessive assertiveness. Very rarely will a dog bite its owner this way, especially if the human has taken the trouble to become the 'alpha' (leader of the pack).

Naturally, if you've only recently acquired an older dog, perhaps from a shelter, you should take proper precaution when using this technique. Put a collar on the dog and keep a thumb inserted under it behind the dog's neck. Be prepared to jerk sideways, if necessary.

Sideways jerking is to be preferred to a sharp pull backwards, when possible. Dogs' neck muscles are very strong, but throats can be too easily bruised. The movement is to protect the owner and inform the dog, not to punish.

Off-leash training to discourage jumping is also possible. Wear a pair of well-protecting pants and have the dog stand in front of you. Training a 'sit' is, of course, a very good defense against jumping. But they can't sit all the time. Jumping usually follows standing or running. So, start the exercise with the dog standing.

Watch for the body tension that precedes jumping and when you see them about to jump order a 'sit'. If the dog jumps anyway, lift your leg slightly and bump the dog's chest with your knee or thigh. At the same time, thrust a palm near the dog's face away from you. Issue a sharp command: 'off!'. ('Down' is a separate behavior, requiring a different word.)

The idea isn't to slam the dog in the chest, nor to push a hand into its face. The raised knee helps to keep the dog off and puts it off balance. The hand in the face both obscures its vision and discourages a repeat jump.

If you have a partner you can work with, leash training may be useful in more stubborn cases. As the dog starts to leap, have the partner jerk sideways as you issue the 'off!' command. You should issue the command, not the partner. You need the dog to focus on and obey you.

In the absence of a partner, and when working outside, it may be possible to wrap a long leash around a tree or post. The difficulty is that the jerk will then usually be more back than to the side.

Positive reinforcement techniques can be used, too. Take a treat or a favorite toy in one hand. As the dog starts to jump, hold out the treat or toy above and slightly behind the dog's head. That distracts the dog and puts it slightly off balance. It also encourages a sit, just when the impulse was to jump.

Repetition and consistency are, as with any training, important when training 'off'. Be patient and firm. With time, most dogs will learn to suppress this natural behavior until and unless they receive permission to jump.

## **Training Your Dog Not To Bite**

According to the CDC (Center for Disease Control), dogs bite more than 4.7 million people per year. Law suits, medical bills and sometimes dog euthanasia are common results from this unwanted - and often avoidable - behavior.

As with any dog training issue, how easy or difficult it is to train a dog not to bite will vary with the breed, age and individual temperament of the dog. But there are some common techniques that will usually help suppress biting behavior.

Wherever possible, start young. Puppies have a natural inclination to mouth and nip. Though it's often encouraged by owners who understandably see the behavior as cute, human restraint is a prerequisite to dog restraint. Good - and bad - habits start young.

Beyond about the age of four weeks, puppies can begin to learn simple commands. When the puppy moves his mouth to bite, a gentle, but firm 'No!' followed by a slight squeeze of the muzzle can help.

Be careful not to cause the puppy to bite its tongue, though. Be especially careful not to squeeze hard or too high up on the muzzle. Dogs have sensitive and delicate odor receptors high up inside the nose. You never want to damage a dog's ability to smell.

The squeeze isn't to punish, but to inform. The goal is to help the young dog associate the verbal command with something it can understand at that age - discomfort. Most dogs naturally dislike having their muzzles squeezed at any age.

Along with verbal discouragement and gentle physical restraint or reminders, socializing your dog - as young and often as possible - can help develop calm and confident dogs. Fearful dogs,

those not used to strangers (whether human or animal), are much more prone to biting behavior.

Expose the dog to other (non-aggressive) dogs. Differences in smell and looks are triggers that can cause dogs to become wary. Introducing them to variety at a young age can help discourage this territorial response.

Most dogs will naturally inhibit biting when playing with litter mates. They nip, but learn early not to press hard. Take advantage of this by 'widening' the pack to include family members, other pets and frequent visitors.

Restrain your pet at first when introducing animals from other households. Restrain the other animal as well. Let them approach slowly and sniff or carry out other natural behavior.

Look for body tension, snarling, erect ears and other indicators of oncoming aggression. Make the dog sit, stroke its back and put out your hand to the other animal then convey the smell to your pet. Then allow them to interact.

Dogs normally learn bite inhibition by four and a half months, but don't be discouraged if it doesn't happen that quickly. Breeds vary and so do individuals. Older dogs, ones not trained early to suppress biting or not socialized, will naturally be harder to train.

Some dogs will never be fully trained not to want to bite. Part of training involves training people, too. Make sure any such dog is unable to reach other people or animals. And, make sure that people are informed not to try to interact with the dog.

Gradual, persistent, patient training will usually pay off in a calmer, more playful pet. And this, despite the effort involved, is better than paying off lawsuits!

## **Socializing Your Dog**

Dogs, like humans, show a wide range of tolerance for others. Some are immediately friendly with every new dog, cat or lizard. Others are forever hostile to even the opposite sex of their own breed. Considering dogs are by nature territorial the diversity is odd, but there it is.

Naturally, animal lovers like to have more than one dog around and often several breeds or other species. Ensuring that chairs remain upright and necks unbitten can be a real challenge. Add to the mix the neighbor's pets or random critters who wander into your companion's territory and your furniture, not to mention your sanity, can be at real risk.

The first step is to start the process of socializing your dog as early as possible. Like children, puppies are much more accepting of strangers. They haven't yet distinguished between friend and foe and everything is a new experience to be explored rather than feared or chased.

If you have only one dog, expose the puppy early on to other dogs and people. Get them used to being touched, especially between the toes, in the ears and near the eyes. Apart from impact on interaction with animals, that will make vet visits and trips to the store a lot easier.

Dogs, of course, sniff everything. When they're about to interact with another, control them until you're confident there won't be chasing or violence, then let them explore the other dog, cat or creature.

If the dog shows a tendency to leap or bite, tolerate it to the point someone is going to get injured. It's normal for dogs to rough house, knock one another over and even lightly bite legs and necks. Stay close and be prepared to snatch them away, if necessary. Leather gloves may be useful during the initial experiments.

If they continually bark, distract them with a treat, a toy or a sharp command. If they refuse to cease pulling or barking after several attempts at control, try another day. What works will vary widely depending on the individual dog and some will simply never tolerate others. You'll discover what's more and less effective as you observe their interactions over time.

It may be necessary to put the dog on it's back, then hold it down with a firm hand on the chest. In harder cases a bark or shout in the dog's face is useful. Yes, you will look like a lunatic to others, but this technique is even employed by the Monks of New Skeet. The brothers of this upper New York State religious order are world-renown for their German Shepherd raising practices.

Rescued or animal shelter dogs can require extra patience when socializing. These animals have often been abused by people or injured by other dogs. Those experiences naturally often lead to aggression or fear. Remarkable transformations have been seen even in these dogs, though. After repeated exposure they often learn to at least tolerate other people and pets.

Start early, expose for short intervals leading to longer ones, repeat as needed. In every case, be prepared to physically and mentally control the dog.

## **Pet Tricks Training**

Teaching your pet tricks is easiest when you work with their nature, not against it. Most dogs are eager to please and respond enthusiastically to rewards. Teaching tricks is often as much a matter of simply using those rewards to direct or build on a spontaneous behavior as it is teaching an entirely foreign one.

Watch for spontaneous behavior close to the one desired. A dog will sometimes crawl on its belly for no apparent reason. It may be scratching or it may simply be having fun. If this is a desired trick, watch for the beginnings of the behavior, then be prepared to associate it with a hand gesture and voice command, then reward immediately.

Teaching the basic 'sit', 'come' etc commands is usually simple. A few repetitions with a treat or verbal praise and the dog learns rapidly. Teaching tricks can sometimes be as easy as expanding on the basic behaviors. 'Come' can easily be transformed into 'walk in a circle'. Abbreviate to one word, such as 'circle' or 'spin' for example.

At first it might be helpful to use treats to encourage wanted actions, but don't overdo it. Dogs spoil easily, and ultimately you want the dog to respond to verbal command and praise without food rewards. After the command-behavior pair becomes automatic, treats can be withdrawn.

Favorite toys are a good way to encourage certain tricks. Take a short rope the dog loves to play tug with and encourage a jump by moving it rapidly up and down, just out of reach. Then, after the command-behavior pair is established forgo the rope and just use your hand.

Hide-and-seek is another game easily taught using a favorite bone or chew ball. The dog's sense of smell is keen not only close up but at surprising distances. Take advantage of it by hiding the toy under a box a few feet away, then lengthen the distance, remove the box to another room or place it up on a table. Proceed in stages.

Dogs' affection is a useful trick training aid. Many spontaneously want to offer a paw to express themselves. Put the dog in a 'sit', then kneel down in front of him. Hold up your own 'paw' and give a command 'five' (for 'high five' or 'give me five' or 'paw', whatever works).

Sometimes the paw comes up right away, for others you may have to gently pull it up using the voice command at the same time. Praise anyway, once you're in position. Put the paw back down and try again.

Extending tricks is easy, too. Start with one 'high five', then extend into 'sit pretty' by taking the paw and lifting gently. The other will often come up spontaneously. Hold both and praise and reward. When sitting at the desk and I want mine to sit pretty, I often pat my chest and up he comes followed by lavish praise.

Training tricks should be fun, both for you and the dog. Other training is for safety, control, discouraging property destruction, etc. Tricks are strictly to give you and your friend something to laugh about. Enjoy!

## **Pros and Cons of Electronic Fences**

Electronic fences are a control device. That said, electronic fences can be a blessing or a curse - not only for the dog but for the human as well. An 'electronic fence' is a set of devices, usually underground wire and transmitters, that deliver a noise, shock or unpleasant spray via a collar to a dog approaching the boundary. The wire is buried a foot or so under the ground along a perimeter of 500-1000 feet and as the dog approaches it a signal is sent to the collar, activating the deterrent.

Electronic fences are expensive, but some Home Owners Association rules or city ordinances forbid regular fences leaving few options. Useful for those who want to avoid or can't erect a regular front yard fence, it becomes even more desirable for those with no back yard fence at all.

The potential downsides, though, are many.

Sometimes viewed as a substitute for needed training, dogs require careful instruction in dealing correctly with an e-fence. Shocks or disturbing noises aren't automatically and instantaneously interpreted correctly by dogs. They have to be taught to associate the shock or noise with the limit of allowed movement.

Systems can be shorted, by lightning strikes (unusual) or by careless digging at the perimeter (less unusual). Flags mark the boundary after initial installation, but they're intended to be removed after the dog has been trained. Sometimes, though, they're left in place and get knocked down or dragged away by lawnmowers, kids and other causes. Once down their tips can point up and have the potential to produce a harmful puncture.

Particularly assertive or unintelligent dogs chasing 'prey' will sometimes barrel past the barrier, oblivious to the temporary shock. Being on the wrong side of the fence discourages voluntary returns home.

And, of course, many reasonably believe that electric shocks are a cruel or at best counter-productive way to solicit desired behavior from a friend and companion.

But, everything in life has risks that need to be weighed. Dogs confined solely indoors except when leashed don't experience needed opportunities to run. In some locales, dog parks or other areas that make possible free running can be hard to find or far away. And running is a deep-seated need of almost all dog's natures. Frustrate that need and you produce a maladjusted dog.

Fences of standard height can be forded by large dogs, but accidents can produce punctures from chain link and scrapes from wooden fence tops. Even when the initial wound is minor, dogs have a tendency to worsen them by biting and scratching, producing hot spots. That means a trip to the vet. Sometimes an electronic fence is actually safer in the end.

No 'one-size-fits-all' recommendation is likely to be satisfactory given the wide variety of living circumstances, breeds and individual dogs and training regimes. The best that can be said is to consider all the facts, not least of which are the physical and psychological health needs of the dog. Then make an informed choice.

Just be prepared to disable the fence if it proves to do more harm than good.