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Bringing Home Your Adopted Dog

A Time of Transition – For Everyone!

There are few things more satisfying than adopting a dog from a shelter or rescue organization. For an adult dog, the first few weeks in a new home are a critical transition period. It's important that you know what to expect and how to work with your new best friend. Adoptive owners view a dog's new life in their home as a wonderful change from a shelter pen –which it is! – but the change in the dog's daily routine and caretakers can present some challenges for the dog. In the new home, the dog suddenly faces a new set of social companions in a new environment filled with unfamiliar smells, sights and sounds. He will be confused, stimulated and a little frightened. He faces a big adjustment as he learns his way around and develops relationships with his new family. Some undesirable behavior may accompany this transition. Don't worry! By modifying or redirecting his actions, you can help your dog become a solid citizen.

Typical but undesirable behaviors

Below are some behaviors your newly adopted dog might exhibit. Work with a trainer to help with strategies and techniques to address these behaviors. Most of all, don't panic! Your dog will sense this, and he may result to undesirable coping strategies out of confusion or his desire to please.

- Jumping up
- Exploratory behavior, including mouthing and chewing new things
- Stealing food
- Accidents in the house. Whether your dog came from a shelter or a foster home, the new surroundings (and rules) are different. Don't assume your dog isn't housetrained because he has accidents in the beginning of life in his new environment.
- Wild running and play in the house. Frequently this behavior is encouraged by children (and some adults); the new dog cannot yet distinguish between indoor and outdoor behavior.
- Door bolting. Shelter dogs often have door-bolting instincts. They've been penned-in and a doorway, especially one to the outdoors, represents an opportunity to explore or escape (remember, your new dog doesn't intuitively know he's hit the jackpot with you...he's operating on instinct).

The first days and weeks following an adoption are a critical time for developing new habits and learning new rules. Dogs are particularly impressionable in a new environment, especially the first time they try a behavior. Therefore, plan to invest time during this period to socialize, teach and get acquainted with your new dog.

Keep in mind

- Remind yourself and your family of the commitment you've made in getting a dog: daily care and exercise, attention to his medical needs, and training.
- During the transition period, a dog needs time to adjust to the rules and schedule of your household. And he needs your leadership! It is up to you to teach your dog good, acceptable behaviors. If you don't provide direction, your dog won't know what you want from him and this can be frustrating for both of you.
- A dog cannot do damage unless you let that happen. When you can't supervise, keep her in a pen, a dog run or other secure area, or in a crate with chew treats or toys.
- Don't give your dog free reign in your house. This can be overwhelming to a new dog and he may find troublesome ways to cope.
- When outdoors in an unfenced area keep your dog on leash (you can use a 30 ft. long training lead) and supervise him. You'll be able to observe his drives and tendencies (e.g. he likes to chase squirrels, he's afraid of kids on bikes or skateboards, etc.) and you'll be able to maintain absolute control.
- During the first weeks with your new dog, supervise him even when he's in a fenced yard. If there's a way to escape, most dogs will find it.
- Don't kiss your dog or place your face at the dog's eye level before you have a more solid relationship and have begun training. A face at eye level can be threatening to a dog.
- Don't issue a command your dog might not know, or unless you are in a position to teach it and enforce it.
- No single training approach is right for every dog.
- Beware of sending mixed signals that bad behavior is cute or entertaining. This is especially important with small dogs because it's easier to overlook or excuse their bad behavior; they don't present the physical challenges of a large dog, but oftentimes those behaviors ultimately become annoying to you and your guests.
- Don't mistakenly reward bad behavior. Anticipate and remove opportunities for undesirable behavior. Don't let your dog dash out the door, for the accompanying feelings of joy and freedom are self-rewarding. Don't leave food on the counter, because if the dog grabs a tasty sandwich, counter-surfing has just been reinforced.
- Do not keep dogs in dark, damp basements, garages, or non-family areas; this thwarts your efforts to raise a socialized, well-behaved, housetrained animal.

Be your dog's benevolent leader

Your dog begins assessing his new family and environment the second he comes into your home. Most dogs can be motivated to do what we want with calm, clear and consistent direction. And lots of positive feedback! All which are hallmarks of good leadership. Obviously, every dog is different and the suggestions made in this

guide are general. Please work with a dog training and behavior professional to determine the specific needs of your newly adopted dog.

Leadership during the “honeymoon”

In many cases, dogs from shelters or dogs that are re-homed from a foster or rescue organization have a “honeymoon period” where they appear calm, submissive and totally dependent on you. This honeymoon period can last anywhere from a few days to several months. It is usually during this period that new owners believe they’ve adopted the perfect dog and forego everything they’ve heard or read about being their dog’s “leader”. Don’t be fooled! Your dog is distracted, and not totally relaxed, due to all the new things in his new environment. Therefore he’s likely to act more reserved. If you fail to provide structure and boundaries your dog can develop habits that you might not like.

Simple ways to communicate leadership

Your dog looks to you for direction all day, not just during periods of training. Focus on introducing rules and boundaries throughout the day during normal, everyday activities, and keep in mind the following key themes.

Personal Space

Personal space is extremely important to dogs. When you see a group of dogs together, they are constantly communicating their personal space requirements through their body language. For example, a dog that isn’t interested in playing when another dog tries to initiate play will turn her head and will not make direct eye contact. She is simply saying “no thanks”. If the other dog ignores her request (he could be “pushy” or perhaps he isn’t good at reading other dogs’ body language) he might get growled or snapped at. A well-balanced and socialized dog will respect other dogs’ personal space “bubbles”.

Sharing our personal space with our dogs is one of the pleasures we get from having them in our lives. Where we run into trouble is when we haven’t established rules about how and when a dog is allowed in our space.

When you are home and supervising your new dog, have him drag a leash on his flat buckle collar so you can calmly direct him where you want him to go. It does no good to give your dog a bunch of verbal commands and requests he doesn’t understand. You must show him, and reward him with a treat or praise when he’s doing what you want. Work with a trainer to learn techniques. Keep the following themes in mind:

Greetings – many dogs develop what we call a ‘greeting disorder’. This is when we (and our guests) have made the mistake of coming home and greeting our dogs as if they were human– with lots of eye contact, high-pitched voices, touching and excitement. In turn we get a dog that jumps up, steps on, or invasively sniffs us and our guests. This might seem cute at first, but it becomes old very quickly, especially if you have a medium- or large-sized dog. The most constructive way to “greet” your dog is actually to ignore him when you first come home. This includes not making eye contact. Then, when your dog is calm and not being demanding or invasive, give attention and affection. But remember: manage the excitement. Instruct your guests to do the same. This is a big step toward having a well-mannered dog.

Doorways - Shelter dogs often have door-bolting instincts. They've been penned-in and a doorway, especially one to the outdoors, represents an opportunity to explore. You must teach your dog that you are in charge of access to the outdoors (or access to visiting guests), and reward your dog with the opportunity to visit the outdoors (or calmly sniff guests) when he's calm and waiting for your "okay". This is especially important at the front door or whatever door is used most in your home. Practice having your dog sit and wait while you open and close the door, and reward him with a treat when he does so. Practice this repeatedly before the distraction of someone actually being at the door.

Kitchen – Have a large personal space "bubble" in the kitchen area. You don't want a dog that is constantly underfoot, or one that learns there is tasty food on the counter. It only takes one self-rewarding counter-surfing experience for a dog to learn to learn this bad habit. And it's a difficult habit to break. Identify a place near the kitchen where your dog can still see you, but where he's out of the way. Put down a mat or dog bed and then teach him to "stay". Until he's learned what "stay" means, use your body as your tool (body blocking) to indicate to your dog to back up and stay outside of your kitchen "bubble".

Family Room & Furniture – like the kitchen, keep a mat or bed in the family room (or wherever your family usually gathers) and teach your dog to enjoy spending time on his mat. Use chew toys, bones or other long-lasting chew treats to make your dog's designated "place" enjoyable. Although you may not mind your dog on your furniture, don't allow him to jump on it whenever he wants. Make lounging on the furniture an invitation-required activity. Again, use a leash to calmly redirect your dog – over and over again, if necessary – to where you want him to be. When you want to spend one-on-one time with your dog, go ahead and snuggle on the couch! Just make sure you're the one setting the pace and your dog has "earned" it with calm behavior and good manners. Note: dog behavior and training professionals often recommend observing a "no furniture" rule for the first few months your dog is in your home. This allows you to set definite boundaries until you and your dog get to know each other better. Then you can introduce the privilege of furniture access at your own pace and when you know your dog can handle it.

Sleeping area – it is often tempting to allow your newly adopted to sleep in your bed. This is not recommended by most dog behavior and training professionals because this might not be the best thing for your dog, and it is a habit that is incredibly difficult to break once it has been established. Once you've developed a relationship with your dog, and you have a better understanding of his temperament and overall behavior, you may decide that this privilege is something you can introduce. Until then, it's best that your dog has a confined sleeping space, such as a crate or a confined room (such as the laundry room). See Bedtime in the Coming Home/First Day section of this guide for more information.

Food

Food should be extremely valuable to a dog. Because our pet dogs don't have to hunt for food, it quickly loses value and we lose an opportunity to have our dogs "work" for their food. Creating rules around feeding time helps your new dog learn impulse control, which is very important if you have children or other animals in the house.

Free feeding vs. scheduled feeding – unless your new dog is malnourished (in which case you should follow your veterinarian's instructions), you should establish a feeding schedule and stick to it. Scheduled feeding times help your dog's body get in a potty routine. This enables you to anticipate when he might have to go to the bathroom and allows you to show him where the appropriate potty spot is. If your dog walks away from his bowl, pick it up and try again at the next feeding time. To make dry kibble more appetizing, use a little warm water which helps release the aroma of the kibble.

Excitement around food - Teach your dog that the food bowl materializes only when he is calm. Like greetings, manage the excitement around feeding time. Take advantage of a teachable moment: don't allow your dog to just dive in! Require that he sit and wait until you "okay" him to the bowl.

Begging and human food – it takes just one handout for most dogs to learn that the dinner table is where the action is. Again, begging might seem cute at first, but your next dinner party guests might not think so. And you're sure to take exception when you leave the kitchen for a moment only to return and find your dog standing in the middle of the table licking the plates clean. Not to mention, some human foods are not good for dogs. During your meals you should ignore your dog (this includes eye contact) and don't feed him from the table. Better yet, teach him a solid down-stay and give him a bone to chew on while you spend uninterrupted time with your human family.

Leash walking

Exercise is extremely important both mentally and physically for your newly adopted dog, especially one that may have been in a kennel environment and has lots of pent-up energy to burn and outdoor experiences to catch up on. Lack of exercise and boredom are the most common causes of undesirable behaviors.

Leash walking provides physical activity and is a wonderful relationship-building and training exercise for you and your dog. Access to your backyard (no matter how large) does not fulfill a dog's exercise requirement; it just becomes a big, boring, landscaped kennel.

Depending on your dog's exercise requirement, typical leash walks can be as short as 20 minutes or as long as an hour. Some dogs require more than one walk per day. Or you might have adopted a dog that needs vigorous exercise, like jogging. An under-exercised dog will exhibit problematic and annoying behaviors, like jumping up, chewing, digging, and excessive barking.

Even dogs with a lower exercise requirement need the mental stimulation of seeing and smelling new things on a walk.

You walk the dog, not the other way around – teach your dog from the beginning that you determine the pace, direction and activities on a walk. Alternate “all business” walking intervals with periods where you “okay” your dog to stop and sniff. Don’t hesitate to promptly change direction – over and over again – until your dog figures out he needs to pay attention to you in order to keep moving forward. Work with a trainer to learn how to teach your dog to walk on a relaxed leash and not pull.

Vary your route – it only takes a few walks on the same route for your dog to “know” where you’re going, and oftentimes a dog will pull, especially if he knows a visit to a fun destination, like the park, is in the plan.

On-leash meet-and-greets with other dogs – you may not know much about your dog’s social history with other dogs. Impromptu on-leash meetings, especially with another dog you don’t know (and if the dogs are very excited), can erupt into conflict. Because you’re working to establish a trusting bond with your dog, don’t put him in a situation that might get out of control. Unless you’re confident in your handling skills and your dog’s social skills, work with a dog professional to introduce your dog to new dogs.

Attention, Affection & Play

Attention, affection and play are common areas where well-meaning owners can inadvertently reinforce undesirable behaviors from their newly adopted dog.

One of the things we love to give and get from our dogs is affection - Affection is wonderful if given and received at the right time: when the dog is calm and not in an excited state of mind or “demanding” attention by barking at or pawing us.

Eye contact is a powerful tool and a form of attention - give it, and your dog is receiving reinforcement for whatever behavior he’s giving or state of mind he’s in. Although your words might say “no no no” your eyes say “yes yes yes”. Your silence and lack of eye contact speaks VOLUMES to your dog. It says “carry on...I’ll let you know when I need you.” Like your personal space, your attention is something you, not your dog, should control.

Playing with your dog is an important bond-building activity - An excited voice, toys, exaggerated body language (like the play bow dogs give each other) are all ways to initiate play with your dog. Roughhousing, especially with a dog you don’t know well, is not encouraged and can actually cause your dog to become over-stimulated, which leads to undesirable behaviors like jumping and mouthing. Remember that you control the timing and intensity of play. As you get to know your dog better, you’ll be able to tell when he is getting too excited and you need to calm things down a bit.

Keep in mind

- Dogs coming from a shelter especially need leadership to feel secure. Don't make the mistake of giving your dog free reign in your house (thinking he needs it after his stint in the shelter pen). This can be overwhelming for a dog in a new environment.
- A fearful or wary dog requires different leadership than a confident dog, but its leadership nonetheless: calm, clear, consistent guidance and direction. If you've adopted a fearful dog, work with a dog training and behavior professional to learn how to expose your dog to new people and things.
- If a newly adopted dog growls or snaps, take note of the circumstances surrounding the event and contact a trainer immediately. Don't punish or correct your dog physically, as this could make matters worse or, if the dog was growling out of fear, make it more afraid. Remember, this dog doesn't know you and is likely overwhelmed by his new environment.
- Dogs don't do things out of spite; this is a human concept. Dogs exhibiting undesirable behaviors are usually just looking for ways to cope.

Mentally prepare yourself and your family— all things will not go smoothly at first. Your new dog will be looking to you for direction - start practicing the moment you take over the other end of your new dog's leash!

Adopted Dogs & Separation Anxiety

Adopting a shelter dog is a wonderful way to gain a new, loyal family member and change the life of a special animal. However, many shelter dogs can suffer from separation anxiety.

The signs of separation anxiety in shelter dogs include:

- Destructive behavior such as digging, chewing, scratching, urinating or defecating in the house (despite being house trained).
- Destructive behavior when left alone, regardless of the length of time.
- The dog follows you from room to room, never letting you out of his sight.
- The dog displays frantic, exuberant behavior upon your return home.
- The dog reacts with depression or signs of anxiety when you prepare to leave.
- The dog dislikes being outside alone.

The best way to make the transition from a shelter to your home as easy as possible on your new best friend is to have patience. Dogs are considerably more relaxed and responsive to learning and following routines and rules when they are in a secure, non-threatening environment.

The following tips will help to ease the transition and help relieve symptoms of dog separation anxiety.

Practice low-key departures and arrivals: Although it may be difficult at first, it's important to completely ignore your dog for the first few minutes after arriving home. Once a few minutes have passed, calmly and nonchalantly pet your dog keeping your voice low at all times.

Practice makes perfect: It's important to practice departures and arrivals, gradually building up the time your dog is gone. Begin by gathering the things you do as you are leaving, keys, coats, etc... and then sit back down. Repeat this until your dog no longer shows interest in what you are doing.

Offer comfort: When leaving your house, offer your dog an article of your clothing that you have worn recently. Your scent will give your dog a sense of familiarity.

Establish a routine: All dogs, not just those you have lived in a shelter, are happier and become well-adjusted easier if their owners establish a daily routine.

When you first bring your dog home, should you spend the whole day with them? No – this is one of the biggest mistakes dog adopters make. Instead, have their bed, safe chews toys, and water in the confined area in which they will be staying when you are gone- whether it's a crate or area of the kitchen. Take the dog to that area, tell the dog to lie down, give a chew toy, a treat, and praise using their name.

Next, step away. If the dog remains quiet and calm, good. Don't speak to them because it can distract and excite them. Before the dog grows restless, take the dog outside or play with them as a reward.

Return her to the crate, then go into another room for longer periods. Next, leave the house and come back in right away. Gradually make those trips longer and longer; vary the duration you're out. Your dog will be less anxious as she learns that when you leave, you eventually come back.

Give her a treat while she's in the crate, and talk to her while she is in the crate, so she'll come to accept the crate. By being reliable, you'll gain her trust.

A tired dog is a good (and happy) dog. Before you leave your dog for extended periods, exercise her vigorously. Then, for 20 minutes before leaving the house, go about your business calmly - then just leave. Other than your standard departure sentence ("guard the house" or "be back soon") don't make a fuss saying good-bye.

Coming Home

The First Day

Dogs thrive on routine, so orient your new companion to your schedule. As long as you are consistent and provide leadership, your dog will adjust.

Manage the environment – dogs will explore everything, so dog-proof your house and possessions.

Getting acclimated/housetraining helpers

When you bring your new dog home, walk him outside on-leash so that he can take in the smells of the turf and relieve himself. Pick a special place and encourage him to potty there. Be patient; it may take 10 or 15 minutes. Always praise warmly and offer a treat when he relieves himself in an approved spot.

Next, enter the house and show him around. Keep him on leash. If he lifts his leg to mark, quickly interrupt with a sound (eh eh!) then take him outside immediately. Give him a high-value treat (like a small piece of real chicken or beef) for going in the right place.

Remember, your dog will be excited and anxious about his new home. Don't be surprised at panting and pacing, whining, excessive yawning, housetraining accidents, excessive drinking or chewing, or gastric upset. Any dog, especially a male who was not neutered early, is likely to mark new territory - especially if other pets have lived there. Tell every member of your family to resist the temptation to overwhelm a new dog. Give him some time and space to get settled.

Next, take him to his crate or confinement area. Encourage him to sniff around; reward him with small treats for entering and staying in the crate. Keep soft bedding and safe toys in the crate; rotate the toys for variety.

After the house tour, take him outside to potty again. Be sure to take him to the same spot.

If your dog is not housebroken, begin housetraining now. Consult a dog training professional for guidance. Stay tuned in and responsive to your dog's signals of when he needs to go. The more vigilant you are now, the more reliably housetrained he'll be later.

Unless you plan on having your dog regularly potty indoors on paper or a potty pad (e.g. you live in a high-rise apartment), try and restrict the use of papers and pads (except with puppies in a pen).

Having a few accidents the first week does not mean a dog is not housebroken. Excitement can lead to accidents. In addition, males tend to mark in the house the first day or two. Once he begins to settle in, and you begin educating him in acceptable behavior, he will relax and behave.

Introducing your new dog to your other dogs

Before bringing a new dog home, be sure all animals are healthy, have current vaccinations and test negative for parasites. Realize that even if the dogs met successfully on neutral turf, things are different when you bring a new dog home. Make sure there's another person at the homecoming so the dogs can meet on-leash outside.

Prior to the introduction, leash-walk the new dog outside. Then bring out the other dog (one at a time if you have multiple) on leash. Make sure whatever collars you're using are secure and won't slip over your dogs' heads. **GO FOR A WALK BEFORE YOU ALLOW THE DOGS TO SNIFF EACH OTHER.**

Make sure you are relaxed, so you don't telegraph anxiety through the leash. Avoid keeping the collar pulled tight, since "restraint frustration" elevates tension and the risk of reactivity. The dogs will be more relaxed knowing they have some room to maneuver. Watch carefully so you can interrupt and move a dog away if necessary (like if the dogs start to challenge each other).

Make the meeting pleasant with verbal praise (calm) and treats (timed to reward good, relaxed behavior). Introduce gradually, making sure the animals are calm. Pet the resident dog, assuring that everything's OK. If it's not OK, suspend introductions and resume the walk. Be careful to reward only good behavior.

Keep the dogs within sight of each other. If the animals are receptive to each other, praise each one and reward them with treats and petting to show that good things happen when they are together. If there is a negative reaction, move back to the distance at which neither reacted. Watch for signs such of arousal (when adrenaline levels are starting to climb) such as fur raised on the back, staring or stiffening up.

If one dog reacts aggressively, don't punish the aggressor; instead, take him in a neutral area to settle down and ignore him. If both dogs act aggressively, remove each to different, neutral areas. Try re-introducing later in the day.

When correcting unacceptable behavior, timing is critical. Do not wait for the lunge; at the first hint of aggression, such as a stare, redirect and remove the dog from the immediate area. Don't be alarmed if they don't warm up to each other immediately. Either dog may engage in aggressive posturing, barking, marking, housetraining accidents and possessiveness over toys and people. (If this persists beyond a week or so, consult a trainer.)

When the dogs come inside leave the leashes on for quick control if needed. Keep all toys and treats out of sight until everyone is comfortable. An added advantage to having two people present when introducing dogs is the one-to-one human-to-dog ratio. However, if you're alone, you can tie one dog's leash to a doorknob or sofa leg at a length that allows the animals to sniff each other at a safe range.

The more socialized both dogs are, the less time it will take for them to become friendly. Try not to be nervous or your dogs may sense the tension and even defend you from the other dog. To avoid injuries, keep new pets separate from others when you aren't able to supervise. (Some owners find it's best to continue to keep dogs separated at mealtime, and to keep toys off the floor to prevent conflict.) You might crate the newcomer in a family area. Avoid keeping him in a highly coveted area, such as near the other pets' food bowls.

Acclimation can take days or weeks. Be sure to give each pet at least 20 minutes of quality time alone with you each day - play, brush, massage, practice rewardable skills. Once the animals react well to each other, remove the leashes. Keep watch, and keep a spray bottle or whistle on hand to interrupt the pets if they begin to stare or otherwise misbehave. Continue rewarding good behavior with praise and training treats. Always let your dogs know what you expect of them, and they'll be responsive instead of confused.

Socialization is critical - and is more than just exposing the dog to new experiences. Remain confident and relaxed, which also allows you to be sensitive to cues from the dog. If a dog does not sense his person can handle a situation, he may react by barking, growling, lunging or trying to bite in an attempt to control the environment.

Introducing your new dog to people

A new dog feels bewildered and stressed by all of the changes, and surrounding her with too many people might cause her to cower or nip. So delay introductions to friends and neighbors until the dog has had a chance to settle in. (However, you should start practicing leadership right away. See **Be Your Dog's Benevolent Leader** earlier in this guide.

Make introductions one at a time, on leash for control. Exercise and calm the dog before meetings, and have training treats handy to shape and reward good behavior. You may want to have the dog on leash so that you can interrupt and redirect immediately as needed. Make sure the visitor is relaxed, and that you convey confidence.

Instruct visitors to ignore the dog at first meeting (this includes eye contact). Allow the dog to sniff the visitor first, before any petting. Beware: if the guest is tense, the dog may sense this and become uncomfortable. So set the tone with your actions and attitude – keep business-as-usual with guests. Read cues from your dog: how comfortable does she appear? Many dogs love new people, while others feel overwhelmed.

Expect your new dog to engage in behaviors you'll need to correct, such as growling or jumping on people. Allowing a dog – even the little ones! – to jump on people is a common mistake, but to avoid exasperation down the line, teach your dog "off" from the start. In addition, don't let anyone engage your dog in aggressive play such as wrestling, tug of war, or play biting.

Bedtime

Your dog can, especially at first and if he is fearful or insecure, sleep in a confined space (crate or ex-pen) in the room with you and your family. For some dogs, sleeping on the human's bed can aggravate resource-guarding behaviors, so exercise caution. See **Sleeping Area in the Simple Ways to Communicate Leadership/Personal Space** section of this guide for more information. If your dog begins to growl or show other signs of aggression to anyone in the household, work with a dog training and behavior professional.

Dogs & Children

Never leave children alone with your dog. Teach your own and visiting children:

- The proper way to approach a dog (avoiding direct eye contact, from the side, and hand extended low).
- Not to rush up to, scream at, or pester a dog.
- Never harass or mistreat a dog. Don't jump on or rough-house with dogs.
- A dog can't whine or cry, so he tells you he's afraid by growling and nipping.

Obedience Training & Owner Education

How important is obedience training and owner education? Essential! In fact, training is the biggest factor in whether you have a successful, healthy relationship with your dog. More than 90% of dogs in shelters are there because of common behavioral problems that can be addressed.

You've got options when it comes to dog training. You can take a group class, which means you'll spend training sessions in a group with a trainer and then do most of the work at home between classes. You can have a trainer come into your home and work with you and your dog in private sessions. Or you can enroll your dog in a board-and-train program where a trainer teaches the dog over a multi-week period and then instructs you how to maintain what your dog has learned. Whatever option you choose, at the end of the day it's all about you. The kindest and most responsible thing you can do for your dog is to learn about dog behavior and continually guide your dog with patience and consistency so he learns how to behave in a world of humans.

Training will make your dog a trustworthy, socialized family member and forage a bond with your dog.

10 questions to ask when choosing a dog trainer

When you decide it's time to train your dog, finding a professional to help you can be a daunting task. Use the following list of questions when interviewing potential dog trainers to ensure you're hiring someone experienced and trustworthy:

1. What dog training methods do you use?

You'll want to know how the trainer teaches your dog a particular behavior. Make sure you're comfortable with the process.

2. How long have you been training dogs?

More years in the business doesn't always mean a better trainer, but someone who's been doing it for a long time has seen a wide variety of behaviors and has hopefully learned from their experiences.

3. Where did you receive your training?

Anyone can say they're a dog trainer; it's an unregulated industry. Make sure the trainer you choose is certified through a training school, such as Triple Crown or Animal Behavior College. Ask if the person has experience outside of training schools, such as with animal shelters or rescues, which represents a different and useful skill set.

4. Do you participate in continuing education programs to keep your expertise up to date?

A good dog trainer will be able to discuss the latest research and emergence of the latest techniques and tools in the industry. They should also be able to direct you to informational web sites and publications and shouldn't hesitate to do so.

5. Do you have experience with my dog's breed?

Although not an absolute, pure bred dogs tend to share similar characteristics. It's helpful if the trainer you choose has worked with your dog's breed.

6. Have you worked with dogs that have issues like mine?

Dogs are unique individuals with different temperaments and drives, so no dog will be exactly like yours. However, you'll want to choose a trainer who has dealt with situations like yours before. A good trainer will be able to identify when they're out of their depth and will gladly refer you to another professional.

7. Can I speak to a former client or do you have written testimonials?

A good dog trainer WANTS you to ask this question and knows that happy clients are what keep his or her reputation sparkling and business thriving. Ask for a referral to a client with a situation similar to yours

8. How long will it take before I begin to see results with my dog?

A good trainer should answer this question thoughtfully. There's no one correct answer; it depends on you, your lifestyle, and your particular dog. But don't be surprised if a trainer says you'll see results immediately, especially if your dog spends one-on-one time with a trainer. A good trainer knows how to evaluate your dog's unique drives and tap into them in short order.

9. Will I be able to continue training my dog once he is finished with your program?

A good dog trainer knows if the owner can't replicate the training at home, it won't work. Be sure the trainer you hire emphasizes the importance of follow-up and is clear about his or her availability after your dog has completed training.

10. What are your rates?

Make sure you understand the full scope of training services and the cost associated with them. Ask if any equipment you'll need is included in the cost of the program.