



The Best Place to Adopt a Pet

CHOOSING A HUMANE DOG TRAINING PROGRAM

Unfortunately, there is no regulatory agency or licensing required of those companies or individuals that offer dog training. Some companies or individuals are still using very harsh, traditional methods that will damage your relationship with your dog, may cause physical harm to your animal and may actually bring about behavior problems! Dog training, just like child rearing, is in a tremendous revolution to find more humane, safe ways of communicating and thus modifying behavior. You need to find a company that believes in using positives and is on the cutting edge of new methods. Training your dog should be fun and non-abusive!

Anyone, regardless of experience or methods, can hang out a sign saying they train dogs. For this reason, you need to be very careful when choosing your training class. To help you find a safe, fun and humane training class, please use the following questions to screen a potential company who is not on our referral list.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING METHODS DO YOU USE?

You want to find a company that uses food and toys in the training. Food training is one of the fastest, easiest and most enjoyable ways to train a dog. It builds trust, clear communication and helps cement the bond between you and your dog. Once your dog understands what behavior is expected of it, he is gradually weaned off the food treats.

Avoid any company who forbids the use of food in training. The old school of thought used to be that a dog should just "do it" because we tell him to and we should just be able to reward him with verbal praise only. Verbal praise is not enough for most dogs to learn quickly or with enthusiasm. It must be paired with something that the dog loves, such as food or a favorite activity. Scientific studies have given us more information on how to effectively and humanely change behavior. Outdated methods such as pulling up on the dog's collar and pushing down on his rump to teach a simple sit or jerking on the leash to "teach" the dog not to pull should be avoided.

WHAT KIND OF CORRECTIONS DO YOU RECOMMEND?

For a humane, knowledgeable company, corrections should consist of brief timeouts (30 seconds to two minutes), a discreet squirt from a water bottle or a simple denial of a privilege. A company who understands behavior modification will strive to use almost no corrections but place a lot of emphasis on teaching the dog what is acceptable and then rewarding him for doing the acceptable behavior.

Avoid companies that instruct you to yell, hit or pinch your dog in any way, jerk the leash, hang your dog by his collar, throw things (such as throw chains or cans with pennies inside), pinch his ear or twist his collar. All of these methods are outdated, downright dangerous and will teach your dog to fear you, not respect you. These are also methods that your small children will not be able to replicate and would actually put them in danger of being bitten if they did try to mimic them.

WHAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT DO I NEED FOR CLASS?

A humane, knowledgeable company will tell you to bring lots of small yummy food treats, a 4 to 6 foot leash, and to keep your dog on a flat, buckle collar or a head collar. (A head collar is like a halter for horse only it is scaled down to fit on a dog's head. It is a very humane, safe training tool for dogs that are hyperactive, aggressive or just pull too hard on the leash. It is sold under the brand names of Gentle Leader™ or Halti™)

Avoid any company or class that requires you to put your dog on a choke collar or a pinch (prong) collar. Recent medical studies indicate that choke collars can cause trachea damage and when used with force (jerk and release) can cause your animal's neck or back vertebrae to pop out of alignment. This causes a very painful condition! Pinch collars are painful and can cause an animal to become aggressive to you or other animals. Pinch collars can also *increase* aggression if your animal is already having problems in this area.

ARE YOUR INSTRUCTORS MEMBER OF APDT AND NADOI? WHAT KIND OF CONTINUING EDUCATION DO YOU ATTEND?

APDT is the Association of Pet Dog Trainers. This organization promotes continuing education for dog trainers using safe, humane methods. NADOI is the National Association of Dog Obedience Instructors. Membership in this organization requires the individual to have a certain number of hours in teaching and training dogs and each applicant must take a written exam. NADOI also promotes humane dog training. Chances are if the training company does belong to one or the other or both, they are making a concerned effort to stay current with more humane training methods.

Continuing education in the field is quite important as more sound, humane methods become available to us. Look for companies who attend conferences such as ADPT or NADOI or even Western States Veterinary Conference. Pick an instructor who attends training seminars on a yearly basis, regardless of how "experienced" they claim to be.

Avoid a company who has not even heard of those organizations and who does not attend any continuing education conferences or seminars.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS ARE TAUGHT IN CLASS?

Basic behaviors should be covered such as sit, down, stand, stay or wait, come, off or leave it, walk on leash (without pulling), socialization, health issues, handling exercises as well as discussions about aggression prevention and common behavior problems. Handling teaches your dog to calmly accept being touched all over his body. This is especially important, as your animal will need to receive health care from you and your veterinarian for his whole life.

Stay away from companies who offer just heel, sit, come, stay and down with no handling exercises or discussions about aggression or problem prevention. They are not offering you a complete training program and may inadvertently encourage behavior problems in your pet dog.

IS THERE SOCIALIZATION OR PLAY TIME FOR THE DOGS?

This means that are the dogs are allowed to play together under supervision. This is HIGHLY important for puppies (4 months and under) as it helps them to develop social skills with their own species and thus avert dog aggression later in life. For older dogs, it is not as important but a nice bonus to have if all the dogs are agreeable. Make sure the playtime is supervised so bolder dogs are not allowed to terrorize the shyer animals.

Avoid a company that does not offer playtime for puppies or who tries to tell you that you can not train a dog until it is six months old. Dogs can "learn" as early as five weeks of age and can continue well into their senior years!

DO I GET A TRAINING MANUAL AND HANDOUTS?

A higher quality company will not only give you a training manual but will have weekly handouts as well. This saves you a lot of frustration, as you will not have to take notes!

Avoid a company who does not at least offer some handouts. These companies are not of very high quality nor are they interested in your success with your dog outside of classes.

MAY I WATCH A CLASS ALREADY IN PROGRESS?

A company that has nothing to hide will gladly let you watch a class at the level you are interested in. As you watch, keep the following questions in

mind: Does the instructor seem to enjoy teaching? Would you be inspired by this instructor to train your dog? Is the instructor supportive of all students? Are the dogs having fun (look for wagging, relaxed tails!)? If you were in class, could you follow the teacher's instructions easily? If there is an unruly dog in class, how is that handled? Does the family receive extra help or are they ignored? What kinds of training techniques are they using (are they using food and toys verses leash jerks or pushing or pulling on the dogs)?

Avoid a company that will not let you observe a class in progress. They are hiding something from the public and it probably is not positive!

HOW MANY DOGS ARE ALLOWED IN ONE GROUP CLASS AT A TIME?

A maximum of 12 dogs to a class with at least one head trainer and one assistant is acceptable. If the number of dogs in the class are 8 or under, usually one experienced instructor is sufficient.

Avoid any company that has over 12 dogs per class, no matter how many assistants they have. Not only is this dangerous but you will not be receiving much individual attention, if at all. There is no excuse for over crowded classes other than that this company cares way too much about money and way too little about the quality of their instruction!

SPECIFICS ABOUT THE PRICING OF CLASSES

The old adage, you get what you pay for is in full force when it comes to dog training. The lower priced classes offered through parks & recreation departments or from the cities are often led by inexperienced trainers who can offer little individualized instruction. Dog training is not like reading a single cooking recipe and then saying you are a chef. There are many positive ways to solve behavior problems and teach new behaviors. You need to have an instructor who has the experience and knowledge of many "recipes" to help you and your dog fully.

Handouts are usually not given out in lower priced classes either. Trying to take notes when you are training your dog is a lot like trying to take notes when you are in the middle of playing tennis, very awkward and slows the learning process!

Look for a price of about one hundred to one hundred-fifty dollars with all the features mentioned above. Just remember that training your dog is as important as feeding him a proper diet. Don't skimp on it! Without proper, humane training, your dog will not fit in properly into your home or worse yet, may develop behavior problems.

If you do decide to go with a parks & recreation class, ask for all of the above information. If the sign up center does not know the answers to your questions then ask to speak directly to the person who will be teaching the class.

SPECIFICS ABOUT "CLICKER TRAINING"

Clicker training is a small hand held box (about 1" wide by 3" long) that makes a very distinctive click when pressed. The click is paired with a food reward so the animal soon learns to associate the click with being "correct." The animal is then shaped in small steps towards a final "goal" or behavior. This method has been used very successfully in the last fifty years in training over 140 different species of animals worldwide. In fact, most of the animals that are used in films and television commercials have been clicker trained. Clicker training focuses on teaching acceptable behaviors using heavy positive reinforcement.

Although the method is relatively old, it's wonderful application to training the average pet dog has just recently been discovered in the last three to five years. The Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley approves of this training method and encourages its use to teach any dog (or cat or rat or bird!) what is expected of it.

SPECIFICS ABOUT PUPPY CLASSES

For competent puppy classes, look for a company that:

- ◆ holds classes indoors (easier to disinfect thus reducing the chance of disease)
- ◆ allows puppies to start at 10 to 12 weeks of age after at least two series of vaccinations
- ◆ requires a negative fecal exam (this is a check for internal parasites),
- ◆ does not allow adult dogs (ages 5 months & up) in a puppy class (older dogs can frighten & bully young puppies)
- ◆ does offer socialization and supervised playtime during class

We welcome your comments about training companies that you have found particular helpful and also welcome comments about companies who were less than ideal. Our shelter does provide a referral list for trainers in the bay area. Just call the number below and request a training packet. *Or, if you simply can't decide who's program to enroll in and need some help deciding,* please call our Dog Training and Referral Helpline at (408) 727-3383, Ext. 759. Happy Training!

REFERRALS FOR DOG TRAINING CAN BE FOUND AT THE FOLLOWING WEB SITES:

Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT)
www.apdt.com

Worldwide Clicker Training Referrals
www.wazoo.com/~marge/Clicker_Trainers/Clicker_Trainers.html