



## 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 on behavioral problems! You need to find a company that believes in using positives. Training your dog should be fun and non-abusive! Using safe humane ways of communicating with your dog has the best chances of modifying behavior.

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 that 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 that 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 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 Outdated methods such as pulling up on the dog’s collar and pushing down on his rump to teach a simple sit, or jerking on the leash to “teach” the dog should be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 that 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, 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 four to six foot leash, and to keep your dog on a flat, buckle collar, or a head collar. (A head collar is like a halter for a 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 is very painful!

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 CPDTs? MEMBERS OF APDT OR NADOI? WHAT KIND OF CONTINUING EDUCATION DO THEY ATTEND?**

A CPDT is a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (<http://www.ccpdt.org/>), one of the few certifications which requires trainers to demonstrate their knowledge and continue their canine education. APDT is the Association of Pet Dog Trainers ([www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com)) 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. Each applicant must take a written exam as well. 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 humane training methods.

Continuing education in this field is important as more sound, humane methods become available to us. Look for companies that attend conferences such as APDT, 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 that 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”, “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.

**Avoid** from companies that 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 dog.

### **IS THERE SOCIALIZATION OR PLAY TIME FOR THE DOGS?**

Socialization is the time dogs are allowed to play together under supervision. This is very important for puppies (four 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 that tries to tell you that you cannot 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.

**Avoid** a company that does not 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 (food and toys verses leash jerks, 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's probably 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 is under eight, 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 overcrowded classes.

### **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 cities, parks & recreation departments, and chain pet stores, are often led by inexperienced trainers who may not have the education and background to offer 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 not usually given out in lower priced classes. Trying to take notes while you are training your dog is a lot like trying to take notes when you are in the middle of playing tennis; it is very awkward and it slows the learning process!

When searching for a training class keep in mind that training your dog is as important as feeding him a proper diet. Without proper, humane training, your dog will not fit in properly to your home, or worse yet, may develop behavior problems.

If you do decide to go with a parks and recreation class, ask for all of the above information. If the registration office 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 3/4" wide by 1-1/2" 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 50 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, its wonderful application to training the average pet dog has been

discovered in the last three to five years. Humane Society Silicon Valley approves of this training method and encourages its use to teach any dog (or cat, 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 as early as 10 to 12 weeks of age (after at least one series of vaccinations)
- Does not allow adult dogs (ages five months and up) in a puppy class (older dogs can frighten and bully young puppies)
- Does offer socialization opportunities and supervised playtime during class

Our shelter does provide a referral list for trainers in the bay area at [www.hssv.org/behavior](http://www.hssv.org/behavior). Or, if you simply can't decide which program to enroll in and need some help deciding, please visit [www.hssv.org/training](http://www.hssv.org/training) or Behavior and Training Department at (408) 262-2133 x352. Happy Training!

Additional Professional Referrals can be found at [www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com) and [www.ccpdt.org](http://www.ccpdt.org).