

## Why Train Your Dog?

By Mary Horne, CPDT-KA

January has been designated "National Train Your Dog Month" by the Association of Pet Dog Trainers ([www.APDT.com](http://www.APDT.com)). The educational organization chose January because so many dogs and puppies are adopted or purchased from breeders and brought home during the winter holidays. The APDT wants to help these new canine family members and their people get off to a great start!

Over the last 10 years or so, the US (and maybe other countries, too) seems to be experiencing a "doggie baby boom." In my daily comings and goings as a trainer, I see many clients who are inviting dogs into their homes for the first time since childhood. The number of multi-dog households is also on the rise; for some people, like me, having more than one dog is twice or three times the fun. (It can also be quadruple the work if the decision isn't carefully thought through, and it is certainly many more times the expense!) Dogs are clearly "in" just now.

Twenty five or 30 years ago, most people who had purebred or specialty dogs got them to serve a specific function in their lives: sheep herding, duck or upland bird hunting, flock guarding, protection, etc. People who obtained purebred dogs knew what their dogs were bred to do and trained them to enhance their natural proclivities. It was rare that someone who didn't plan to hunt with his dog brought a Vizsla into his life.

Today, many purchases or adoptions seem to be made on looks or style alone. People see a dog in a TV commercial or magazine ad, on the street, or (sigh) in a pet shop, and think, "Oh, he's SO cute!" It's love at first sight, and before they stop to really consider the implications of their move, the dog is in their home. Many people then seem surprised when their Labrador or Golden Retriever begins to mouth their arms and pick up everything in sight, their Weimaraner or Vizsla never tires, their Border Collie herds their children and nips at their heels, their German Shepherd

Dog is hyper vigilant, their Beagle keeps his nose to the ground, their Jack Russell Terrier won't back down from a threat, etc. You get the idea!

The first step to a happy life with a dog is to recognize --preferably *before* you bring him home—who that particular dog is and what he was bred (over generations, consciously, by human intervention) to do. Understanding (and anticipating) normal dog behavior is really important!

The second step is to *teach* your dog what kind of housemate and family member you want him to be. Dogs don't come knowing the rules of our human households any more than we would innately know the rules of etiquette when visiting a foreign country. Education is required.

The great news for us is that modern dog training is *really* fun—fun for the dogs *and* for us! Gone are the military-style dog training days (we hope!) of yelling and intimidation. Today, dogs and humans are on the same team. Training means establishing clear lines of communication in both directions—up and down the leash. It involves brains rather than brawn. It isn't so much about “fixing the dog” as it is about arriving at a mutual understanding about what works and what doesn't for both. And like anything worth doing, it takes thought, time, and effort. But the benefits are myriad and the process is reward in and of itself.

## NINE THINGS TO LOVE ABOUT POSITIVE TRAINING

Training *strengthens your bond with your dog*. See how much more attentive your dog becomes after just 2 or 3 5-minute sessions of fun training.

Training *doesn't take a lot of time*. If you recognize that any time you and your dog are together, one of you is training the other, you will be a lot closer to understanding why your dog behaves the way he does. Use your time together wisely. Set up your dog's life so he can easily behave in ways you enjoy and has minimal opportunities to make mistakes. Spend a few short minutes each day actively training your dog by teaching basic manners, tricks, retrieving—anything, really! Use the time when you are

going to interact with him anyway (before meals, on walks, when you first come home, etc.), and you will see results. Leave his behavioral learning to chance, and you are likely to be disappointed.

Training *builds trust* in you and in the process of life in general. By teaching a dog what we want him to do, a lot of uncertainty is removed. This can benefit the shy dog and the assertive dog alike.

Training *allows your dog greater freedom*. A dog who comes when called can enjoy off-leash hikes in safe areas. A dog who doesn't jump on people is more likely to be welcome at gatherings.

Training *gives your dog something to think about*. I once heard someone say our biggest crime against dogs, after neglect, is boring them to death. We lead very busy lives; however, we ARE our dogs' lives.

Training teaches him *the rules of life with humans*. It's really not fair to punish him for breaking our rules if we haven't told him what those rules are, in a way he can understand. He needs to know how he can get things right.

Training *opens the doors to participation in a whole host of fun dog sports* -- from agility and competition obedience to canine water sports, tracking, canine musical freestyle, and more.

Training *helps keep him in a "forever" home*. Many more dogs suffer untimely deaths from behavior problems caused by lack of proper socialization and training than from disease. A well-trained dog is much less likely to be surrendered to a shelter than an untrained one.

Training *creates one more ambassador for the species*. Legislation to ban dogs from apartment buildings, parks and other public places has been on the rise. There are as many people who are uncomfortable around or downright afraid of dogs as there are those of us who adore them. If we do our part to make sure our dogs are gentle, friendly and under control at

all times when out in public, perhaps we can turn the current tide and keep the places we can enjoy with our beloved companions.

Luckily, today we have a wealth of wonderful training resources based on solid science and sound principles, not opinion and superstition, at our disposal. So join a positive training class, hire a certified private trainer (visit the "trainer search" area of the APDT website), invest in a good training book. Get out there and train your dog and see what a pleasure both the journey and the destination provide you both.

To learn more about National Train Your Dog month and to find helpful training tips, please visit [www.trainyourdogmonth.com](http://www.trainyourdogmonth.com).

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