



Choosing a dog trainer

Why do dogs need to be trained?

Dogs are not born with an understanding of human behaviour and communication. They need to learn about these things. So, dog training is really just the process of teaching a dog to understand and respond to a set of basic instructions. This enables us to control and influence the dog's behaviour when it needs guidance. For example, a dog that is already good at obeying a sit command can easily be taught to sit and not jump up at visitors.

Why is choosing a good trainer important?

When you take your dog to a dog trainer, you are placing your dog's entire future in their hands. Even more so if you have a puppy. So, when you choose a trainer, you should interview them and see them in action before letting them loose on your dog. Some trainers can be quite authoritative and off-putting, but don't be deterred; you are the one interviewing them, and not the other way round!

How do I find a good dog trainer?

Start by contacting a reputable organization, like the APDT, or asking your veterinary clinic for a specific recommendation, but then you will need to make your own judgment.

Draw up a short list of trainers and call each of them to find out how they work. Treat this as an interview. Three important questions to ask a dog trainer over the phone are:

"Do you use food treats during training?"

- If the trainer says "no, it's bribery; a dog should respect you as its master", then they don't understand how dogs learn.

"My dog pulls really badly on the leash, so we can't enjoy a walk. Is it acceptable on a nose halter (Gentle Leader or Halti) to stop my dog pulling on the leash?"

- If they say "No, your dog must learn to walk to heel without using cheats like this", then they are unrealistic and are more concerned with proving a point than having a happy client.

"My dog won't always do what I tell him, do I need to be more dominant?"

- If they say "yes, dogs are pack animals and only respond when they see their owners as the alpha dog in the pack", then they have outdated ideas about dog behaviour that any well-educated trainer should have left behind.

Finally, when you have found a trainer who passes those tests, go to see them in action.

A good dog trainer is someone who:

- Stays calm and in control.
- Treats the dogs kindly and with understanding, and does not resort to shouting, physical punishment and techniques such as "alpha rolling" when a dog becomes difficult.
- Makes the people at the class feel confident and doesn't undermine them with niggling and criticism.
- Is focused on the same objective as you; a well-behaved pet and not a circus animal that does tricks.
- Tries different approaches and explanations, rather than just blaming the owners when the dog doesn't do what it's told.

Some trainers still use harsh methods, such as pinch collars, physical punishment, hanging, alpha-rolling and shock collars. There is no justification for the use of such methods, regardless of the dog's behaviour.