

Thank you for choosing a German Shepherd Dog to be your new companion. You are taking home one of the most intelligent and trainable dogs. This is a brief guide designed to give you some basic advice to help you and your new dog live a happy life together.

German Shepherds were bred in Germany in the nineteenth century as herding dogs. Since then their versatility and adaptability has enabled them to become popular in all corners of the world and fulfill many roles in society. They are used by the police and army as guard and sniffer dogs, by blind people as guide dogs, by farmers as sheep dogs; and of course as a companion animal.

The German Shepherd Dog is without doubt a devoted, affectionate and loyal member of the family.

A one man dog

The German Shepherd Dog has a reputation of being a one-man dog, protective of his owner, and sometimes aggressive towards strangers. It is true that the German Shepherd Dog's most outstanding characteristic is his loyalty and devotion to his human family. This loyalty together with your dog's responsiveness to command and natural suspiciousness of strangers makes the German Shepherd Dog a superb guard dog and protector of the family. However this can be a potential problem if allowed to get out of hand.

It is essential that a pet German Shepherd Dog is not allowed to become too dependent on one member of the family. To prevent this from happening it is important that all family members are involved with the training, care and feeding of your dog. When introducing him to friends and family it is important to remember that, unlike certain other breeds, he will not accept strangers immediately and may not tolerate being petted by new people until he has learnt to trust them. Advise visitors to the home and strangers in the street to show him the respect he deserves and allow him to build the friendship in his own time.

Mixing with other dogs

As with most other breeds it is vital that your dog is allowed to mix with other dogs from a young age if he is to grow up with the necessary social skills. As an adult dog, continued relaxed socialising is equally important. If your dog is kept away from other dogs, or pulled away from them on a lead, he will soon get frustrated and problem behaviours may develop.

You should build good recall skills, so you are sure he will come back to you on your command, and then you can let your dog off the lead to mix with other dogs. Practice recall in the garden and on a long lead in open spaces, rewarding him with treats and attention when he comes back to you. During this period of training it is important that you allow your dog to socialise on the lead with other dogs in a relaxed way: if you yank him back every time you see another dog he will soon associate that unpleasant experience with other dogs and learn to bark at them to keep them away.

Training classes also provide a very controlled environment where your dog can socialise with other dogs, and learn to behave well and respond to you in their presence.

Chasing dogs and other animals

Chase aggression is another problem often encountered with this breed. As with Border Collies and other herding breeds, the chase drive in the German Shepherd Dog is a natural instinct. Try to transfer this behaviour onto suitable objects by encouraging your dog to chase toys.

Maintaining good basic control, including good recall and keeping your dog's focus on you, is essential in preventing chase aggression.

Mouthing

Young German Shepherds are easily stimulated and like to explore everything. This can often lead to 'mouthing': gently but continuously grabbing hold of you with their mouth. This problem will be most commonly encountered by new owners when trying to groom their dog or during excited bouts of play. It is important that your dog learns to be groomed without 'mouthing'. This can be achieved by having regular grooming sessions at times when your dog is relaxed, perhaps after exercise.

If your dog displays 'mouthing' during play, try to encourage him to focus his attention onto toys. As soon as your dog's teeth come into contact with your skin, give a loud "Ahh" and leave the room for five minutes. This should soon stop the unwanted behaviour.

How much exercise will he require, and what kind of exercise?

As with other working breeds, mental stimulation is as important as physical exercise. German Shepherd Dogs are highly intelligent and without adequate stimulation will get bored and may become vocal and destructive.

For you and your German Shepherd to lead a happy life together it is important that you keep him well stimulated and physically exercised. There are many things you can do to keep your dog mentally stimulated.

Training is a constructive and fun way to get your dog to use his brain. If you are unsure about training methods, it may be a good idea to attend a training class. German Shepherds are also well suited to advanced training and activities such as agility, tracking and obedience work.

There is information on finding a recommended training class at the end of this fact sheet. Toys and games are also a great way to keep your dog stimulated. Encourage him to play with toys during play sessions and when he is left alone. Stuffing toys with food makes them more interesting to your dog.

In the wild, dogs spend a lot of time and mental energy tracking and hunting food and so by feeding our dogs complete meals in dog bowls we are depriving them of activities that come very naturally to them. You can, however, encourage your dog to spend time working for his food by hiding it around the garden or stuffing it into toys such as Kongs, Boomer Balls and other activity balls.

With all large breeds, including German Shepherds, it is important for your dog's physical health to keep weight down and provide plenty of sensible exercise. As with people, swimming is an excellent form of exercise that will not put too much strain on your dog's joints.

Grooming

Grooming is important for both long and short-coated German Shepherds. The breed has a thick coat and grooming will stimulate the skin's natural oils and remove dead hair.

Relax your dog before you begin by using soothing techniques: find out what actions relax him and where he likes to be stroked. Make grooming sessions a pleasant experience for him by rewarding him afterwards with treats or attention. Remember grooming is not only important for your dog's health but also a great way to strengthen the bond between you. Try not to bath your dog more than is necessary as too much bathing can wash the natural oils out of his coat. If you do need to bath your dog after he has covered himself in something particularly smelly, use a mild shampoo or a special dog shampoo and rinse his coat thoroughly.

Keep an eye on the length of your dog's nails. Regular exercise on hard surfaces should keep them short but they may need clipping if he is only exercised on grass.

Only your vet should do this.

It is also important to remember to take your dog to the vet for regular check-ups, and keep his vaccinations up to date.

Feeding

As with all dogs, it is recommended that your German Shepherd be fed two small meals per day. Allow the meal at least an hour to digest before starting any exercise.

A complete dry food should provide a balanced diet and all the nutrients your dog needs.

Remember that, as a dog, he does not have the same preferences or need for variety as we do. If you spoil him by providing him with fresh meat or human food, as a treat, it will be difficult to encourage him to eat his proper food again.

Chewing

All German Shepherds need to chew; youngsters to help jaw development and to grow healthy teeth, and adults to keep teeth clean and as an outlet for stress. To avoid expensive damage to your belongings it is important to provide your dog with appropriate objects that he can chew. There is a huge variety available in pet shops. Avoid natural bones that can be broken and small sharp pieces that can be swallowed - nylon bones are probably the best.

Regular cleaning with a toothbrush and dog toothpaste is a good idea if you can get him used to the experience at a young age!

Dog training classes

It is recommended that you attend a dog training class.

Before registering with any training class make sure you watch a class in progress to ensure that you agree with their methods.

Here is a list of German Shepherd Dog Club of Victoria Branches:

BRANCH	ADDRESS	CONTACT
Ballarat	MorsheadPark Pleasant Street Ballarat	Marilyn 5330 1578
Bendigo	Longlea Reserve McIvor Highway Bendigo	Brett 0409 131 812
Eastern	Manson Reserve Selkirk Avenue Wantirna	Melissa 9800 0999
Geelong	Elcho Park Elcho Road Lara	Maureen 5229 2692
Gippsland	Canal Reserve Punt Lane Sale	Trish 5156 6354
Malvern	Darling Park Winton Road Malvern	Judy 5968 3320
Northern	Bundoora Park Plenty Road Bundoora	Mark 0488 480 480
Skye	KCC Park Westernport Highway Lyndhurst	Alison 9546 7695
Specialist Show Branch	KCC Park Westernport Highway Lyndhurst	Fran 5968 8235
Western	McCrae Boulevard Kealba	Lyn 9311 2867
Wodonga	Wodonga TAFE Grounds McCoy Street Wodonga	Marlene 02 6025 2730