

Training is Communication

Training a dog is based on communication. In fact, it is called intra-species communication. It can strengthen the dog-owner bond and certainly make a dog an acceptable member of human society.

Dogs do what feels good. They do not necessarily do bad things to “punish” humans, they simply do what dogs do. Jumping up is merely an expression of greeting and an attempt to give a canine welcome. To dogs, licking the corners of another dog’s lips shows submission and greeting. Humans are simply too tall and the dog has to jump up. The challenge is to train the dog so that he acts in a socially acceptable manner.

Sneaking into another room to relieve themselves is simply an attempt to keep the “den” clean. Chewing feels good and sometimes is a primary urge. And your best shoes smell wonderful, just like you. Nipping can just be an attempt to play, but puppies need to be taught that our skin is much more sensitive than another dog’s would be. There are many ways to train a dog. But one thing is true; the dog wants to be rewarded. A reward may be as simple as a pet or kind word, or even the absence of punishment, but they need to know that a reward is coming. Starting puppies with lots of praise, treats and playing games teaches a dog to enjoy learning. In addition, giving dogs a puzzle to solve by themselves encourages thinking. Like humans, the dog gains a sense of accomplishment when they figure out how to get the reward. Some techniques might seem time consuming, but if the dog is allowed to solve the puzzle on its own, you will have a dog who enjoys learning and one with confidence in himself.

You can teach a dog to sit, or lie down, by watching them carefully, and giving the command just as they are about to sit or lie down and then praising them, but this could take ages. Using a “lure” encourages them into the position and then can instantly be used as a reward. The quicker the dog is rewarded in the beginning, the quicker the association between the command and the action. This works whether you are training for obedience, agility or simple tricks.

The lure/reward can be anything a dog really wants. Food treats work very well for most dogs. Some, however, aren’t that interested in food. Toys might work for the dogs not interested in food. A dog that isn’t interested in food, toys or playing, can be a challenge to train, but not impossible. Repetition and praise will be the key here.

Treats can be pre-packaged snacks or something you make up yourself. I recommend soft food so you won’t lose your dog’s attention by waiting for him to chew a hard biscuit. Skinless hot dogs work well. They can be sliced into small pieces and put in a small plastic bag. Most dogs love them. Toys can be anything the dog loves to play with, but the training toy will be a special toy—one that is only brought out for training. When the session is over, the toy must be put away until next time.

Training sessions can be very short, especially for puppies. More progress can be made in many short sessions rather than one long one. A few minutes a day can result in a happy, well-behaved and eager dog.

Dog training does much more than just create an obedient, willing companion. Training a dog properly actually strengthens the bond that already exists between dog and handler. Dogs are pack animals, and they look to their pack leader to tell them what to do. The key to successful dog training is to become that pack leader.

Establishing yourself as pack leader is a very important concept for any potential dog trainer to understand. There is only one leader in every pack of dogs, and the owner must establish him or herself as the dominant animal. Failure to do so leads to all manner of behaviour problems.

A properly trained dog will respond properly to all the owner's commands, and will not display anxiety, displeasure or confusion. A good dog training program will focus on allowing the dog to learn just what is expected of it, and will use positive reinforcement to reward desired behaviours.

In addition to making the dog a good member of the community, obedience training is a great way to fulfil some of the dog's own needs, including the need for exercise, the security that comes with knowing what is expected of it, a feeling of accomplishment and a good working relationship with its handler. Dog training gives the dog an important job to do, and an important goal to reach.

Giving the dog a job is more important than you may think. Dogs were originally bred by humans to do important work, such as herding sheep, guarding property and protecting people. Many dogs today have no important job to do, and this can often lead to boredom and neurotic behaviour.

Basic obedience training, and ongoing training sessions, provide the dog with an important job to do. This is especially important for high energy breeds like German shepherds and border collies. Training sessions are a great way for these high energy dogs to use up their extra energy and simply to enjoy themselves.

Incorporating playtime into a dog training sessions is a great way to prevent both the trainer and a dog from becoming bored. Playing with a dog helps to strengthen the all important bond between the pack leader - and a dog.