

## **TEN GOOD REASONS TO TRAIN YOUR DOG**

Many owners believe that dog training is only for those who wish to compete in obedience trials - this is comparative to believing that only children who will go on to be doctors and lawyers should attend primary school! Obedience or Dog Training clubs will guide the owner in the methods used to "train" dogs. Unlike "training" children, we are unable to sit down and explain to the dog why we wish certain behaviour and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. It is necessary to learn how to get the dog to understand our wishes and how to ensure that he responds. The most effective methods utilise the dog's wish to please his owner, and he will readily do this if he is rewarded liberally with praise for the correct behaviour.

Ten reasons to spend time training your dog are:

1. Training of the pet dog is really an education for the dog and owner in how to teach the dog to live in harmony with humans.
2. Training means spending time with your dog - at least 10 minutes per day practising lessons learnt at "school". Both the dog and owner should find this time fun and it helps to strengthen the relationship between dog and owner.
3. The dog will learn to respect the owner as the authority figure.
4. Training will help overcome common problems such as jumping on visitors.
5. Training will add variety to the dog's life and help prevent boredom which in turn overcomes behavioural problems, such as digging and unnecessary barking in bored dogs.
6. Training impresses people. While all the dogs around you are out of control you will be proud of your dog's response to your commands.
7. Trained dogs are easier to handle when grooming or at the veterinary clinic.
8. Some Councils give concessions on registration fees for trained dogs.
9. Trained dogs may compete in competitions. While it may not be your intention to train to this level it is possible to get "hooked". Training should always be enjoyable and is a challenge for the dog and owner to achieve new levels. Competition ranges from basic commands through to agility where dogs compete against the clock over an obstacle course, and tracking where dogs must follow a scent to find a person.
10. Dogs which are trained are a pleasure to take for a walk and a pleasure to own.

## **BEHAVING IN COMPANY**

Dogs, by nature, are social animals. In the wild they would live in small family groups with each dog aware of its status within the group. Born into the group, the puppies learn from experience and observation of other family members and their behaviour towards other dogs, people and objects is formed by this.

When we take puppies into our homes they will already have formed some attitudes towards people and objects from observation of their mother and their experiences from time of birth. Research has shown that it is best for a puppy to be settled into a new home before 10 weeks old and an important age for adaptation to strange sounds and sights is prior to 16 weeks old.

From an early age the puppy must be taught to accept handling, not only by its owners but also by visitors to the household. The puppy should be placed in a sitting position before being patted. It should be conditioned to allowing the ears, teeth and feet to be handled and examined.

It is important that the puppy learns to accept having food removed from its mouth and its feed bowl touched while it is eating as this reduce the chances of aggression over food. It is of utmost importance that the puppy is never teased with food.

Praise for acceptance of handling will help enforce correct behaviour in the puppy.

Once the puppy has had its vaccinations it should be introduced to the wide world. For their own safety, and also to comply with the law, dogs should never be on the street unless on a lead. The dog should walk on a loose lead on the owner's left side with the dog's head level with the owner's left leg. The young dog should be taken into busy areas where people will stop to pat it and it will be subjected to the hustle and bustle of crowds and traffic.

Many dogs accompany owners on car trips, but even if it is not intended that your dog will be a regular traveller in the family car it is still necessary to familiarise it with car travel. There will be times, such as trips to the vet, when the dog will be a passenger in the car and a frightened or excited dog can be a dangerous distraction to the driver. The puppy's first car trip should not be undertaken after a meal as puppies frequently suffer from motion sickness. Initially, car trips should be short drives around the block with a passenger to help control the puppy. The puppy should be encouraged to sit quietly on the rear seat and preferably be restrained by a dog seat belt.

It is important to allow the puppy to experience noises, sounds, smells, people of all shapes, sizes, gender and age so that it can fulfil your hopes of it growing into a well adjusted dog that you can take anywhere.

Puppies will frequently not have completed the course of vaccinations for immunity against infectious diseases until near 16 weeks old so it is necessary to balance the puppy's need for education and socialisation against safeguarding it from disease.

Many veterinary clinics run 'puppy pre-school' classes where owners can learn about pet care and also how to develop correct behaviour in their pup, and the pup can interact with people and other pups – all in a safe environment.

Dog training classes are held in most areas and are an excellent and inexpensive method of learning to train your dog to be a pleasant and manageable companion.

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## **Introduction**

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 that 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. 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, provides 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.

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### **Is a barking dog causing you a problem?**

Some people think it is normal for dogs to bark consistently. It isn't. Barking dogs are a nuisance and are not conducive to good neighbourly relations. Constant barking usually means the dog is bored, lonely, frustrated or ill.



### **Neighbourhood communication**

Neighbours can help each other to solve barking problems by communicating with each other their concerns and needs. Neighbours can assist in identifying the reasons for excessive barking by noting what is happening in the area when the dog is barking.



The City of Port Phillip receives numerous complaints regarding nuisance noise from excessive dog barking. This type of complaint is sometimes easily solved by approaching the dog's owner in a neighbourly manner and discussing your concerns with them.

The following points need to be considered:

- The dog's owner may not realise that the barking is causing an annoyance to other people.
- The dog may only bark excessively when the owner is not home.
- The owner may not hear the barking from various areas within the house.
- The owner may be a very sound sleeper and not be woken when the dog barks.

**So remember, the answers and solutions may be readily found between neighbours, so please contact the dog's owner prior to lodging a complaint with the Council.**

### **Reasons why dogs bark**

Dogs bark for many reasons, and even though they appear to be barking for no reason they are in fact trying to communicate something to their owner or any one who is willing to pay attention.

The following list provides some of the main reasons why dogs bark.

- Lack of exercise
- Inadequate yard space
- Boredom
- Not enough human companionship
- Inadequate shelter from weather conditions
- Hungry or thirsty
- Medical condition
- Provocation
- Disturbances
- Change to family structure
- Change of territory
- Anxiety

Of course dogs also bark to alert their owners of trouble such as an intruder entering the property or perhaps fire. Remember, a 'dog's idea of an intruder' may differ to that of the owner, it could include cats, possums, other dogs, or even birds flying across the property as 'intruders'. Whilst it is acceptable for a dog to bark to warn its owner of an intruder, it is the owner's responsibility to train the dog not to bark at 'normal occurrences' such as possums, cats, birds etc. Barking at 'normal movement/noises' from adjoining properties should be considered to be unacceptable behaviour.

### **Solutions**

#### **Lack of exercise, inadequate yard space, boredom**

Dogs become bored when they are confined in a back yard. This problem can be compounded when the yard is small; the dog is kept on a chain, locked in an enclosure or on a run. Dogs like to explore and enjoy new experiences. This problem may be overcome when the dog is treated as a member of the family, is included on family outings and taken on regular walks.

#### **Loneliness, lacking human company**

Dogs are social animals and enjoy the companionship of other dogs and of their human owners. Those that are left for long periods of time without companionship can become discontented or lonely. Dogs need to interact with other dogs and with people to keep them stimulated. Dogs that are not permitted to have regular socialisation with other animals and humans can become destructive, fearful, or bark excessively as a plea for attention. In the owner's absence, an old jumper containing the owner's scent may comfort the dog. A radio left on inside the house may give the dog the impression that it is not alone on the property. The radio may also help deter potential intruders.

#### **Inadequate shelter**

Dogs require shelter from all the weather elements and may cry for attention if it is uncomfortable due

to the hot, cold, windy or wet weather conditions. They need shelter that provides soft, dry bedding, protection from the heat in the summer and warm and dry in the winter.

**Hungry or thirsty**

Dogs require plenty of fresh water and need to be fed well balanced dietary food every day to remain healthy and contented. A dog will soon let its owner know by barking, howling or whimpering if it has not been fed or has no water to drink.

**Medical condition**

An obvious or underlying medical condition can be the cause of howling, whimpering and barking. Flea or worm infestations, skin allergies and some injuries which are usually easily detected and treated can cause a dog to make excessive noise. A veterinarian should be consulted to eliminate any medical condition from being the cause of excessive noise.

**Provocation**

Remove the source of the provocation or remove the dog. If the source of provocation is a person, discuss and solve the problem with the person or if the person is unapproachable, contact the Dispute Settlement Service.

**Provocation source**

Birds  
Possums

**Possible solution**

Check reason for barking. Retrain dog not to bark at birds.