



PET FACTS



HOW TO CHOOSE A TRAINER

From teaching your dog basic obedience to advanced training for dog sports, a great dog trainer can make all the difference. That's particularly true for new dog owners. Plus, group classes have the wonderful benefit of socializing your pup. But how do you know when you've found the right dog trainer?

Dog training is an unregulated industry. Anybody can print business cards and charge for his or her services, regardless of background, education, or experience. It's essential to evaluate potential trainers before trusting them with your hard-earned money and your precious pet. Don't simply pick the closest training school. Do your research to determine if a potential trainer is the right fit for you and your dog.

Learn More About the Trainer

First, ask the trainer about their methods and training philosophy, and make sure you're comfortable with her approach. Look for a trainer who uses positive reinforcement training -rewarding the dog for appropriate behavior and teaching alternative behaviors in place of inappropriate ones. These techniques are based on the science of animal learning and have the bonus of strengthening the dog owner bond and fostering a love of learning in dogs.

It's also important to determine what you need from a trainer. Are you dealing with problem behavior like jumping on guests or does your new puppy need to learn to "sit" and "stay"? Find out if a particular trainer provides classes or private training that meet your needs.

Services Vary

Usually, a class environment with other dogs provides the added benefit of socialization and distraction training, but sometimes, your dog will learn best in a one-on-one situation, especially if other dogs overstimulate him or make him anxious. Private training can be done at the training school, in your home, or out in the world.

For certain issues, this can be ideal. Some dogs simply aren't ready for a classroom, or perhaps your dog's problem only happens at your front door. However, not all trainers offer services outside their own facility, and you can expect to pay more for someone to come to you. Ask a potential trainer about her education and any credentials she may have.

Some wonderful trainers have learned through apprenticeships and years of experience, whereas others have taken a more academic route in building their skills. Certification with an organization like the Certification Council of Professional Dog Trainers is not mandatory for trainers, but it shows dedication to the profession and an interest in continuing education.

Speak with the trainer to get a feel for her personality and people skills before making a decision. It's not enough to read the brochure or website.

Trainers Teach People

In truth, dog trainers teach people, so you need to feel comfortable being her student. Look for someone who uses the same positive reinforcement with her human pupils that she uses with the dogs. She should be patient, encouraging, and respectful. Try to observe a training class and watch the dogs and students as much as the trainer to ensure they are all enjoying themselves. In addition, ask for references from former students. Look for a trainer who provides more than just the basic training techniques. Dogs and humans have different ways of looking at the world, and the more you understand your dog's perceptions, the better equipped you are to meet his needs and live together happily.

Training lessons should include information about dog behavior, dog communication, and how dogs learn. The importance of socializing is key for a good puppy class, and advice on grooming and handling is an added perk. Great trainers understand that their job is to train you to train your dog.

Although they may want to work with one adult at a time depending on a dog's issues, at some point in the process, they should welcome the entire household -kids included. First-rate trainers understand the importance of getting the whole family on board for consistency.

There are many places to get a recommendation for a trainer, from people at the dog park to your knowledgeable neighbor. Or check out the Certification for Professional Dog Trainers directory or The Association of Professional Dog Trainers trainer search. Regardless of how impressed other dog owners are with a trainer, don't skimp on your research. The trainer needs to be the right teacher for you, your dog, and your individual needs. An excellent trainer is a wise investment and will help ensure a lifetime of happy and harmonious living with a well-behaved dog.

