

P.E.P.

People Empowerment Program

Humane tools to teach your dog to love and respect you.



Dogs naturally tend to live in a structured society - with a leader and followers - a family really. It helps to think of your relationship to your dog as that of a parent to her child. Your dog needs to understand the rules of the household, and to depend on you to take care of him. He needs to know that you are a fair and generous parent. If you don't take the leadership role, the dog might find himself filling the vacancy, making decisions that are often inappropriate, sometimes even becoming aggressive. This handout will help teach him to enjoy being a member of your family, and to leave the responsibilities of leadership to you.

Exercise. Make sure your dog gets enough exercise!! Most adults need a couple of good romps a day; puppies need shorter play periods more often. A tired dog gets into much less trouble than an under-stimulated one.

Reinforce good behavior. Play lots of ball and any retrieving game he likes. Make obedience work fun. Praise behaviors you like, using your voice, treats and petting. Ignore or control behavior you don't like. Try not to lose your temper with your dog. Getting angry - especially using physical punishment - accomplishes little if anything, and teaches your dog not to trust you.

Get his attention. Getting your dog's attention is one of your most important tools. It's difficult to train a dog that's paying attention to something else. One way to develop attention by seeking eye contact before you give him something, like food or a treat. In addition, examine how often you pay attention to your dog, and make sure that he doesn't constantly demand attention from you by pushing, nudging, barking, or whining. If he does, practice ignoring the behavior some or most of the time. Be slightly aloof, and he'll want to please you more.

Groom him regularly. Your dog should allow you to groom him at your will. Often, dogs that seem to enjoy attention actually only like it when *they* want it. Make grooming pleasant, but do brush him, check his teeth, trim his nails, and generally manipulate him to your satisfaction.

Control his feeding schedule. Your dog needs to know who is doing all the hunting in the family! We suggest you feed him twice a day, and have him watch while you put the food into his bowl. Perhaps even hand feed him some of the food, which develops dependency - and attention.

Control his territory. Defending a whole territory is a huge responsibility that belongs to you, not your dog. He can be the lookout, but that should be it. If he routinely barks at strangers walking by the fence or below the deck, either confine him to the house or a portion of your yard where he doesn't see the strangers (human or canine), or call him as soon as he starts barking. Your neighbors will probably thank you!

Use an indoor leash. Attach a leash to your dog's flat or leather collar (not to a choke chain), and have him drag it around the house. Especially with adolescence, this gives you an invaluable tool when your dog misbehaves. Without having to grab his collar, you can pick up or step on the leash quickly, and redirect the behavior. The length of the leash can vary with the dog's problem, size and speed.

Try a tie-down. Just as a child needs a playpen, dogs sometimes need to be confined to one area, especially when they're young. We often suggest a "tie-down." Attach one end of a 36-inch tether to the wall, or under a very heavy piece of furniture. (Bicycle chain is a good choice for chewers, because it usually is covered in rubber and won't damage items.) Attach the other end to the dog's flat collar. Place it in a well-used area such as a kitchen or family room, and put a comfortable blanket or pillow on the floor for the dog to lie on. This is where he gets to munch on a chewie. He can't interact with you, but you can with him. We suggest you start out with short periods, and gradually increase to about half an hour.

Doorway access. Dogs often love to go through doorways first - and sometimes tend to lie right in thresholds. We suggest you restrict the dog's access to doorways, and don't always allow him to precede you into or out of a room whenever he wants to. Teach him "Wait" to stop at doorways, and "Move" when he's lying at the threshold and you want to pass. You don't have to go through every doorway first (what a pain that would be!), but you should make sure he obeys your cues to stop.

Bed privileges. We often suggest that you do not let your dog sleep on your bed, which some dogs see as a position of power. Other high places also seem to be very valuable to dogs, and some will defend those places, sometimes growling to tell the people to back off. If you decide that the bed or couch is where you want him, then teach him to get off cheerfully on your cue.

No matter what, he should sleep in a place of your choice, much as you would have your child sleep in his or her own bed.

Walk him away from the neighborhood. Oftentimes, dogs will extend their territory beyond your yard. With these dogs, it's a good idea to drive elsewhere to walk them, and preferably to a variety of places, so he doesn't think he has to defend certain spots.

Toys. If your dog likes toys and you tend to have dog toys lying about, pick them up and put them in a toy box or drawer out of his reach. Give him one, two or more at a time, and when he's finished with them, put them away.

Games. Be careful with tug of war. Though it can be a fun and useful game, make sure that it's you the dog wants to play with, and that the toy loses its value when you're not playing. Also, take care if you tend to play roughly with your dog. Some dogs become far too excited, and can't control themselves. Don't let him play keep-away with your objects (a very popular game with dogs!) unless you can retrieve them easily.

Hold at least two training sessions every day. Each session should be approximately 10 minutes, should be fun, and should end on a successful note, even if you have to backtrack to make the dog complete an exercise well.

If your dog has not gone to a class, it's a good idea take him. This not only helps him know what's expected of him, it often helps you learn to communicate clearly with him.

Dogs have different personalities - some are far more strong-willed than others, and some will need more management for a longer period of time than others. With your attention and care, you can help your dog be a better companion and canine citizen.

T. King