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TRAINING YOUR CANE CORSO



Training Your Cane Corso is a Requirement

All Cane Corso puppies are sweet and adorable when you bring them home, but one must remember that this darling little thing is going to grow very quickly into a large dog - large dog that can be strong willed and has a dominate nature. You, as the new owner, must establish control and dominance at an early age. If you don't take the proper steps now, this lovable little puppy can turn into a real problem in a very short time. When you bring a puppy into your home, you are bringing him into a new "pack." There are very specific rules that run the pack. It doesn't matter whether you know them or not; the puppy knows them and lives his whole life by them. If you are not careful, you could end up with a 120lb Cane Corso running your home.

When a puppy comes into your home, he will begin to test the boundaries and see where he falls in the pack order. He may exhibit obvious dominant behaviors, such as growling or snapping when he is moved or picked up, when someone gets too close to his food or toys, mounting people or other animals or he may be more subtle. You should be aware and recognize these behaviors and act accordingly.

The most important thing to remember is a Cane Corso needs to have a family unit that is confident. A Cane Corso should never be brought into a family who has members that dislike or are afraid of big dogs. Before you purchase a Cane Corso, make sure that older children (8 yrs+) and ALL the adults in your home are excited and up to owning this breed.

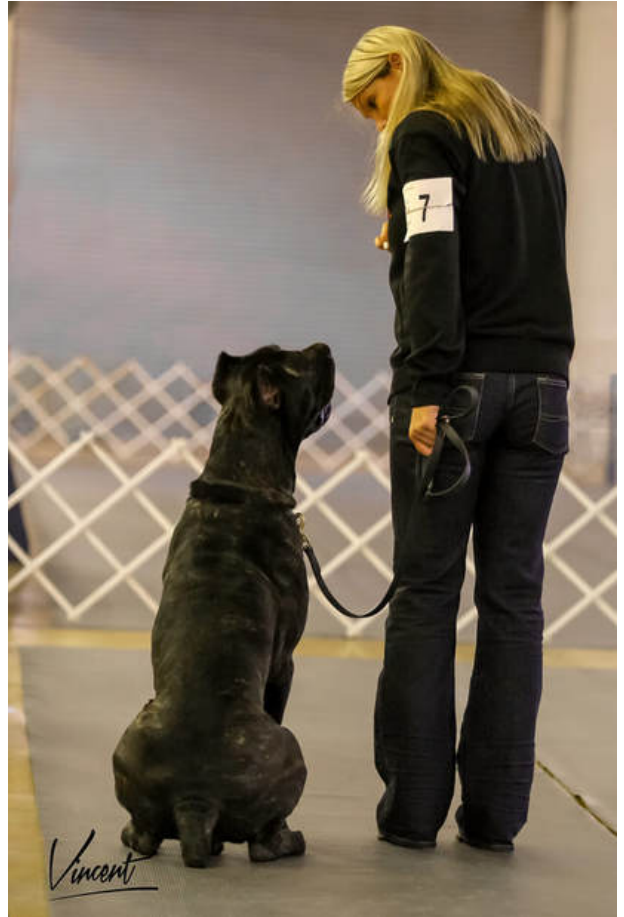
Most of the puppy's understanding of pack order is communicated to him in subtle ways from the rest of the family unit.

Boundaries are very important. It's OK to love and snuggle our dogs, but we should not cater to them and make them think they are the king or queen. 90% of temperament and behavioral issues in the Cane Corso are created and fostered by the owner. Start early, stay consistent!

Crate Training/ Sleeping in His Place

In the wolf pack, one of the things that the leaders do is sleep on higher ground than the rest of the wolves. If your puppy is allowed to sleep uninvited on the bed or the couch, he may think he is equal to you in rank. After all, if he shares the higher ground, he must be a leader. A puppy should learn to sleep in a crate on the floor beside your bed. This keeps him in your proximity so he doesn't feel alone and it also reminds him that he is lower on the ladder since he sleeps on lower ground. Crate training is also an invaluable component of potty training. Right before bed, take the pup on his leash to his potty area outside. Use a "potty" command then praise him calmly for using the proper place. After he goes, place him in the crate, throwing a treat in will help. He may cry, but do not relent. You may put your hand down to him and speak to him so he knows he's not alone. After a while, he will give up and go to sleep. When he wakes, take him out, BEFORE he cries, to his area and use the same words and praises. He may wake in the night at first but will soon find the only reason he can get out at night is to potty. Very soon, he will be potty and crate trained.

Never "over use" the crate by using it as a kennel to keep the dog in for an extended period of time. All dogs need outside dog time to run and play. If the puppy/dog needs to be contained while the family is away, a fenced yard is best and a large, sturdy kennel is essential. A Cane Corso that is constantly crated or locked in the house all day can develop separation anxiety. Puppies need to potty every couple of hours. Forcing them to try and hold it or to be crated with their waste will create serious behavioral problems. People without the proper room for a Cane Corso, i.e. living in an apartment without some secure space outside, should choose a different breed.



Over Bonding

On a further note, puppies actually NEED some time away from the family during the day. If someone is home constantly with the puppy, make sure the puppy has time outside alone. Begin with a few minutes alone at first, then increase time. This way, he develops the confidence to be by himself and to feel safe without you from an early age. You can actually make the puppy fearful if you allow him to get all his strength from you. There must be a balance between time bonding with the family and time to be brave, alone. Don't carry or hold them on your lap too much. Puppies are so sweet and often we want to treat them like babies, but we must resist. Puppies should not be carried/held extensively or allowed to sleep/sit on our lap for hours on time. One of two things will happen - they will become overly dependent on you and become fearful if they are not with you all the time or they become little tyrants that demand their own way and are more than willing to bite if



they don't get it. Kiss them and love them, then put them down and teach them to stand on their own.

Potty Training

There are two basic rules to housebreaking a dog. One: if the puppy potties in the house it's YOUR fault! It means you were not watching the puppy well enough. Two: consistency is paramount. One mistake puts you back days. Puppies need to potty after they eat, after they wake up and after playtime. The key to success is to know when they need to go out and containing them properly when they don't. If you are unable to watch the puppy the whole time he is in the house, put him in a crate or outside to play.

At first, the puppy should be restricted to the area of the house that is in your line of sight. This should be for brief periods of time. Don't risk accidents. When it's time for the puppy to potty, pick him up and go outside with him. Not going with the puppy is one of the biggest mistakes folks make. Just putting him outside to look in won't do the trick. Take him to the area of the yard he is to use on a leash and set him down. Then use a potty command in a positive tone. Eventually, he will get the correlation between the word and the act so when he is older, he will be able to potty on command. It helps to have a set schedule for

feeding and sleeping. Then you know when he needs to go. Don't ever get angry! No rubbing noses in it or swatting with a paper. Remember, if the puppy goes in the house it's because YOU weren't watching close enough or sticking to the schedule.

Socialization, Socialization, Socialization!

We can't say this word enough to people raising Cane Corso puppies. The Cane Corso has several natural behaviors that make them resistant to being social butterflies! If you are living on a farm in the middle of nowhere, 300 years ago, that might be OK. However, in our modern society, the Cane Corso must have some social skills. The Cane Corso is a highly intelligent, perceptive dog. He evaluates every situation he encounters. It's our job to make sure he has all the info he needs to evaluate a situation properly. He must have instruction from us on how to react. The Cane Corso that has a broad reference base is extremely stable. Think of it this way, if a Corso has met everyone, smelled everything normal, heard every common sound, been in hundreds of different situations, he will quickly be able to discern if something is not normal and how he should react. If his experiences are limited, he will trifle with how he should react to basic events. A Cane Corso with a massive experience base is confident with the knowledge he uses to judge the world. Those without much information will struggle to discern how to react in even simple situations. They can become fearful, aggressive or both, none of which are acceptable.

The Cane Corso and Kids

A Cane Corso with proper temperament is very perceptive and is able to bond closely with children. Even though they have a lot of natural instincts that make them generally good with kids, we must curb any behaviors that might confuse our dogs and may cause problems later. First and foremost, children must be respectful of the puppy. It is our job as the adults of the home to make sure that the children do not play too rough, tease or hurt the dog. The Cane Corso has a very long memory. They

may be patient for a while but will defend themselves eventually. Second, the Cane Corso has natural prey drive, which is why they love to play chase games. It is very important that we do not allow a Cane Corso puppy to play the chasing game with children. Kids running and squealing with the puppy grabbing onto their clothes may seem cute, but this "game" establishes that it's OK to treat children like "prey," which obviously it is not.



The interaction between children and a puppy should ALWAYS be supervised. Children and puppies should be encouraged to play in a "low key" manner where the child is always in the dominate place. Puppies should be restrained when a group of children are playing tag, etc. The dog must learn it's OK for children to run, scream and play wild and that the dog does not belong in that game. Games like fetch are good. This requires the puppy to do the child's bidding. Children should never get down low enough for the puppy to jump on or stand over them. This is a subtle dominant action on the dog's part. If the kids play tug-o-war with the puppy, make sure the child wins the majority of the time. Children should put the puppy on a leash and walk him on a regular basis. Even if it's only around the house or if the child is too small to lead the puppy on its own, "helping" hold the leash will get the point across. Children should be warned NEVER to feed the dog any of their food. If the child establishes that it's OK for the dog to have his food, don't be surprised if the dog takes what he wants right out of the kid's hands. A three year old should be able to eat a hotdog on the floor in front of a Cane Corso. He may lick his lips but he should never dream of crossing that boundary. The Cane Corso - kid relationship should be loving, nurturing and full of respect for each other's place. It is our responsibility, as parents and puppy owners to make sure there is NO confusion about pack order between kids and dogs!

No Pulling Please!

We have all seen dogs pulling their owners around the park or down the street. It seems quite comical but tells us who really is walking whom. Pack leaders decide which direction a group takes. You must insist your dog heel and accept your decision as to where you go. This also includes allowing the dog to stop every five seconds to sniff or mark with urine. Leaders do these things, NOT subordinates. At the beginning of the walk, take the dog to the place you want him to relieve himself and give the familiar command. Then be on your way. DO NOT allow constant stops. The pack only stops when the leader does. Teaching your dog to go to the bathroom on command makes your life much easier when traveling, training or confining waste to a specific area.

Scrub-A-Dub-Dub

Trying to hold a 120lb dog down in the bathtub so that he can be washed is nearly impossible. Usually you get the bath and the dog gets away! Teaching your puppy to be bathed is easy and smart. Start when he is young. Each week take your pup into the bathroom and use a command such as "bath." Place him in the tub and, with constant praise, bathe him. Using a



firm, gentle voice, require him to stand still and allow you to scrub. Reward him after the bath with treats and praise. You should require him to stand for drying as well. If you are consistent and make it a positive experience, your dog will get into the bath and stand to be washed when he is grown.

Disciple and Dominance - Who Is the Boss?

It's your job to teach your puppy his place in your family. Start out day one by holding the puppy, in your arms, on his back. Just hang out watching TV and getting him used to submitting to you in a non-confrontational way. If you are blessed, a combination of this and the other "do's" listed here might be enough. But that isn't always the case, considering we are dealing with a guardian breed.

Flat Out Bossy!

If your puppy decides he will reign supreme and the rest of you are his subjects, you will see blatant dominant behavior. These behaviors are: growling or snapping when he is moved, picked up or when someone gets too close to his food or toys. Growling or snapping when he does not want to be put outside or doesn't want to go a certain direction on the lead and mounting (humping) family members are also signs of dominance. Quick, confident action is needed. Don't get angry but be assertive and confident. Anger can break your puppy's spirit; worse yet, if you react with anger and fear, you

may agitate your puppy and cause bad behavior to escalate. Then you have a confused tyrant on your hands that can't tell friend from foe. Always remember that you are the leader, you must set the tone and be the example. Your puppy will take cues from your state of mind.

First correction: tell the puppy "no" quite loudly and move into his space, looking directly at him. Protect yourself from being bitten by grabbing his collar. Give the distinct impression that you have had enough. Release and go about your business. Always remember DO NOT pet the puppy and reassure it that it's OK. This will only reinforce the unwanted behavior. Praise and reassurance is for good behavior only.

Second correction: if the puppy continues to growl or snap without provocation (remember fear and anger), it's time for physical touch. Form your hand into a "claw" and assert yourself by making contact under the ear on the neck. This is designed to simulate the kind of correction dominate dogs use in the pack. When you use this technique, you must be willing it see it through. Commit to it and don't release until you have achieved the desired effect. The desired effect is to see the eyes avert and aggression subdued. This is a great place to use common sense and good judgment as far as pressure and intensity of touch are concerned. Maturity always needs to be taken into account. An eight week old puppy is much different than an eighteen week old puppy. Besides, by eighteen weeks, your puppy should know who the boss is.

Additional correction: occasionally, you will encounter a strong willed puppy. Remember the things we just covered as they are the foundation of discipline. If your puppy continues to test you and, believe me, some will, you will have to match them consistently. Consistency is the key; IF YOU ALLOW UNWANTED BEHAVIOR, YOU REINFORCE IT. If your puppy challenges you and wins, it will only become more confident. If you win all the battles, you can never lose the war. Quick, confident and consistent correction is the key. You must be

quick. If you allow time, the unwanted behavior can escalate. Quickness will break the train of thought and conquer the problem of escalation. Confidence will allow you to be in charge of the situation at all times. This teaches your puppy who the boss is. It also will allow your puppy to relax. Think about it, confident leadership allows the subordinate the freedom to relax. This is important because anxiety causes escalation. Sometimes a little confidence will soothe the savage beast. And most of all, be consistent. Your puppy needs to be able to trust its leader. Consistency builds trust, it lets them know what to expect. If your puppy knows what to expect it can obey you without question. Consistency will provide stability. And just a little side note: if you are consistent in raising your puppy, your adult dog will discern abnormal behavior as well. Especially with people who don't belong to his pack. This critical for guardian breeds.



Subtle Dominance

If the dog truly understands a command and then resists, that is a subtle dominance challenge. First example: the puppy is now big enough to get on the couch. He knows that it is a soft, wonderful place because, admit it, you had him up there before to cuddle and he remembers! As you are walking by, you notice him up on the couch, snoring away with all four feet in the air. He's cute but you don't want him on the couch without your permission, so you tell him to get off. He rolls over and looks at you. Now you know that he knows that he isn't supposed to be up there without your OK. But he isn't jumping up and getting down. No, he waits until you come over and grab his collar and pull him off. Now, when he gets back up there, and he will, you must again pull him off and firmly give him a correction with his collar. Keep doing this until YOU win. Remember to be consistent and NEVER give in. Second example: most of us are pleased when our puppy shows signs of guarding our home or person. A bark or growl is sent out to inform a stranger that they are in "pack" territory. If the stranger has intent to do harm, we want our dog to protect our property and us. But most people that come to the door or up to you on the street are not a threat. As pack leader, you determine who is a threat and who is not. If you tell the dog that this person is OK, he should accept your authority and cease his aggressive behavior.

Teach Your Puppy "All Clear" Commands

These commands defuse your dog and allow interaction with passive persons. Allowing the dog to continue to growl and bark, after you welcome a stranger, is not acceptable. Start them as a puppy with a scuff shake and a stern voice. Tell him "it's OK" or "leave it." Praise him when he obeys and teach him to lie at your feet. Also teach commands like "pet" or "stand" to allow a person outside the pack to examine or touch him. Your dog will meet many people in his lifetime. He should never be aggressive to those not intending harm. Your vet, the show judge, the neighborhood children and your guests will appreciate your well-trained dog.

At 16 weeks, the Cane Corso puppy is ready for basic obedience. We strongly recommend that you search out and enroll in an obedience class with a trainer that likes working breeds. There you will learn about correction using a choke collar. Obedience, in itself, reinforces the puppy's position. Being at the end of a leash and required to obey not only helps establish pack order for the puppy, it actually build his confidence! After the puppy has solid obedience, corrections can be done with a swift tug on the choke for corrections and a lot of praise for job well done.



Just being a puppy

Puppies do things that are "wrong." Relatively few of them are him trying to assert dominance. One must be careful not to overuse dominate discipline. If the puppy is not challenging your authority, don't use a dominant action. The improper use of dominance can make a puppy shy and afraid. If the puppy bites too hard when playing, squeeze his lip hard or thump his nose. Discomfort teaches a lot. Generally, if something causes discomfort, he won't do it anymore. If the puppy becomes more aggressive when corrected, he may need to be rolled but always weigh his attitude. If it

is just "puppy stuff," do not over-correct the puppy with rolling or scruff-shaking. A squirt bottle with vinegar/water is very effective or a can of pennies shaken hard and loud are great tools when the puppy is engaged in unwanted behavior, i.e. chewing things other than his toys, putting his nose in the trash, etc. The key to stopping unwanted behavior is consistency. One day of inconsistency will set you back five with a Cane Corso.

Never Enough Praise

The Cane Corso may be "tough" looking, but most of the time they are all heart. They are extremely intelligent and sensitive. They respond to love and reward better than anything. They want to please and once they understand their position in the pack, they are willing to perform any task the master asks of them. This is one of the reasons they are so versatile. Make all your training fun with praise and treats. It is fine to be firm when the dog is seriously disobeying but never lose your temper. Dogs can perceive anger and fear. True leaders don't have these emotions toward their family. Pack leaders are confident of their position and they know the pack rules. Establish who the boss is in a humane way, and then teach with love, praise and reward.

Written and Submitted by Shauna DeMoss

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