

Rescue Me Canine Training

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Training - Before you begin.

In order to be prepared to train your dog, you first need the following:

- Time and commitment
- Clear goals and expectations for your dog
- A clear understanding of the methods involved
- Proper equipment
- A positive attitude and approach

Time and Commitment – This is a crucial component of dog training. Dogs learn how to behave largely based on what works and what doesn't. If they come up to the dinner table and get a bit of food as a result, they have learned that coming up to the dinner table is a behavior that gets the results they want.

In order to create or modify behavior you must ensure that you are consistently delivering the same message every time. If the same dog comes up to the dinner table and never receives food as a result, it will soon learn that this behavior no longer works and will eventually give it up. This requires commitment and consistency on the part of the owner, and everyone in the household. Usually it has taken a considerable amount of time to create your dogs current behaviour patterns, it is unrealistic to think a couple quick tricks or magic commands will instantly reverse that behavior. It takes an ongoing commitment to make dog training part of your usual routine. However, because every interaction with your dog is a training opportunity, this is easy to do provided you are prepared to stay the course and be committed to the training regimen.

Training your dog also requires time. Time for you to learn how to communicate clearly with your dog and to show your dog what your expectations are, as well as time for you to improve your skills as a handler. Expect to spend 20 minutes a day working with your dog, as well as the time necessary to ensure your dog is properly exercised. In addition, be aware that all time is training time. Whether you are walking your dog, or sitting on the couch watching tv, there is always an opportunity to train your dog. And remember, your dog is always learning even if you think you have stopped teaching. Be aware of what you are communicating to your dog.

Goals – What do you hope to accomplish? While high standards are an important part of training your dog, those standards must be realistic and based on the abilities and behavioral traits of each individual dog. For example, many people set a goal of being able to take their dog to a dog park. While this may be a fun and entertaining afternoon for many dogs, some dogs will simply never enjoy socializing in that environment. This does not mean that these dogs

are maladjusted simple because they do not enjoy a dog park setting. A good analogy would be cocktail parties for people. While many people love the idea of attending a cocktail party, others would sooner go for a root canal than socialize in that setting. This doesn't mean that hating cocktail parties is a behavioral issue that requires therapy and correction. It just means that some people prefer to socialize in other ways. The same theory applies to dogs. Not all dogs react the same way to the same settings, and the nature of your individual dog must be taken into account when establishing expectations.

Methods – In order to properly follow through with training you need to agree with the methods and techniques used. Otherwise you will not have the commitment and consistency required to affect any change in your dog's behavior. There are many different approaches in training, ensure you are using a training method you agree with. Rescue Me Canine Training endeavors to use the most positive method available in every training setting. In most settings dogs will learn quicker, retain the information longer, and build a stronger relationship with the handler when Positive Reinforcement (R+) methods are used. While there are times when other methods such as Negative Reinforcement (R-), Negative Punishment (P-), and Positive Punishment (P+) may be appropriate, R+ methods will always be our starting point.

In order to use these methods effectively, you must ensure you are clear on all techniques being taught. If you are unsure, please ask questions. When training your dog between sessions, keep track of challenges you are facing and raise those questions at your next training session, or for urgent issues contact Rescue Me immediately.

Proper Equipment - While there are a wide variety of collars (flat, choke, martingale, halti, prong, e-collar, harness) and leashes (leather, nylon, chain, retractable). Many of these products can inadvertently cause more problems than they solve when used incorrectly. Particularly tools such as prong and e-collars which by their nature can give extremely high levels of correction and as such have a greater potential for negative results if misused.

The best equipment to begin your training is a 6 foot leash, in an appropriate thickness for the size and strength of your dog and a martingale collar. Martingale collars offer the comfort of flat collars, with an increased amount of feedback, but do not allow the choking danger of a choke chain. They also offer a degree of protection from a dog ducking out of their collar. A 6 foot nylon leash is a suitable length for training but allows easy control of your dog. The nylon material is stretch and rot resistant (unlike leather) and is more difficult to chew through. For dogs that habitually bite through their leash, chain may be another option. While retractable leashes are very popular, dog owners should keep in mind that retractable leashes allow for very little feedback from handler to dog; are difficult to retract in an emergency situation, or when quick recall of your dog is required; and generally allow your dog too much freedom to be useful during training. They also typically utilize a very thin, very strong line which can cause significant damage to people or dogs if a finger, leg, paw or tail gets caught in the leash when tension is applied. For these reasons retractable leashes are not recommended for training purposes.

Proper Approach – The approach or attitude the handler takes regarding training is one of the most important aspects of the process. The handler must remain calm and patient whenever

you are working with your dog. Dogs, like people, are drawn to calm, stable energy. If your dog perceives you to be calm and stable, they are more likely to follow your lead. If your dog perceives you to be angry, impatient, unreasonable or unsure, they are more likely to ignore your instructions and make their own choices, or avoid you all together. If at any time during your training sessions you find yourself becoming frustrated or angry you need to end the training session for the time being and move to something more fun. Play fetch with your dog, go for a hike, play tug, anything to get you back in the right frame of mind. Do not resume training until you are calm and patient. The training process needs to be fun and interesting for your dog to want to participate. Make sure they are enjoying the learning process.

In addition to calmness, a good handler needs to be observant and aware. You are working with a living being whose focus, behavior, motivation and thoughts are constantly changing and evolving. You cannot just approach training from a "If I do X the dog will do Y" perspective. You must always be evaluating your results as you work with your dog. Determine what parts of a technique work best for your dog, and make adaptations based on your observations of your dogs behavior and motivations.

Some people are concerned with the idea of being the disciplinarian when training their dog. This approach presumes that the handler and the dog are somehow at odds. That they want different things and the dog needs to be constantly "kept in line". I think a better analogy would be to think of your role as that of a coach, working towards a shared goal. You need to be firm and clear, but not angry or unreasonable. You need to communicate with your dog when they got something right, and when they got something wrong, but you can do this without being harsh or overbearing. Think of the best boss or mentor you have ever known. Hopefully you can envision someone who helped you clearly see the goals, showed you what was expected, gave you great feedback on your performance and helped you stay on track when needed, motivated you to keep your interest high and make you feel empowered, and rewarded you when you succeeded. This is the approach you should emulate.

Lastly, a good trainer needs to be patient. Be aware that your dog didn't learn their unwanted behavior overnight, and it will take time to change their behavior patterns. Fearful or reactive behavior can take a significant amount of time to resolve. There are no magic commands that can make your dog immediately change their perceptions, it takes time technique and repetition. Try and view your dogs behavior from a broader perspective. While there will undoubtedly be occasional setbacks, look for steady progression from week to week and month to month.