

How to live – and train – harmoniously with your dog



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Pet Professional Guild of Australia
- Member Resource Tool
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As humans, we tend to have high expectations of our dogs. They are a different species with their own methods of communication, body language, vocalisation, and social signalling which they use to communicate with each other and to us. Dogs are known to dig, bark, bite, jump up, eat and roll in smelly things. These are all natural doggy behaviours, yet we rarely, if ever, want our dogs to do these things. It might sometimes be a wonder why we have dogs in the first place!

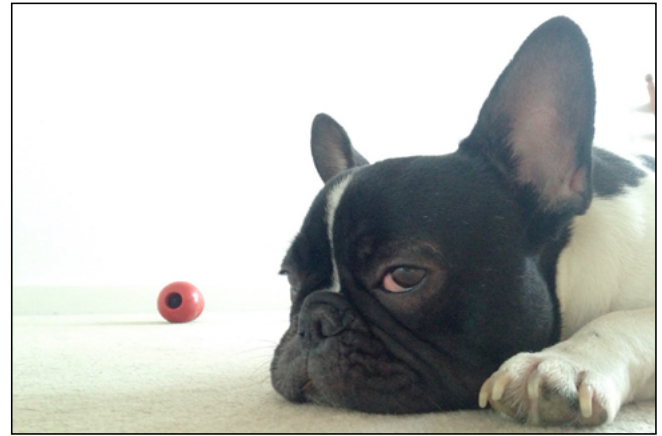


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What is Expected of Me?

You are a dog 'parent'. It is your role to ensure your dog's needs are met. You will be responsible for feeding your dog, providing adequate fresh water, plenty of exercise outside the home, shelter, play, praise, affection, interaction with others and freedom to choose between activities you consider appropriate.

You will need to guide your dog through life and help them adjust to living in a human world. To be loving, kind, understanding and patient with your dog, whilst you teach them the behaviours you desire.

What rules should I implement in the house?

Which household rules you set is up to you, however, it is important you do not make the rules entirely on your own, or else you'll be the only one that follows them and that can confuse your dog. Everyone in your family, or who lives with you or has regular contact with your dog, needs to agree on what rules will be made and how they will be regulated. Discuss the household rules with everyone before applying them.

Management

Puppies and dogs require active and consistent management –of both them, and of their environment. Management includes ensuring items are not within your dog's reach if you do not want them chewed or eaten. Many items can be dangerous to our dogs, so management of your dog's environment is critical.

You can manage your dog by keeping them on a lead when visitors arrive, that way you can reinforce sitting for greeting rather than allowing your dog to jump all over your guests. Just as a teacher wouldn't wait for their students to make mistakes and then yell at them, we too need to try to set our dogs up for success as much as we can, rather than correcting "mistakes". If a teacher wants to move a group of students from one place to the next, they don't just say "Ok, everyone outside". They give specific instructions because they know that if they don't chaos will result. Teachers will often "manage" their class by saying something like "please form two lines behind Sarah and Jack and walk outside to the play area quietly." That's much better than a free-for-all rush outside! We need to provide clear, calm instructions to our dog.

Reward Behaviour

It is scientifically proven, that when behaviours are rewarded they will be repeated. This is the same for every animal and even for humans! The big advantages of using positive reinforcement training are that it enhances the relationship with your dog; does not require physical force on your behalf (so even small people can control the biggest of dogs); this form of training will **not cause any psychological or physical harm** to your dog and it is easier and much less stressful for people to use this type of training. With consistent and fair training that focuses on reward, you will soon be on your way to a happy and well-adjusted dog.

The more you reward the behaviours you like, the more often your dog will offer those behaviours. However, remember, this also works in reverse if you accidentally reinforce behaviours you don't like!

Punishment

Punishment is confusing to your dog, it doesn't tell your dog what you want. It also:

- Makes you seem unpredictable and untrustworthy to them.
- Adversely affects your relationship with them.
- Can strengthen the unwanted behaviour.
- Stop dogs offering behaviours for fear of being punished (or corrected) for doing so.

There are always stressors involved in learning new behaviours, but if your dog has been punished for exhibiting behaviours before, it can make them even more reluctant to exhibit a new behaviour for fear of punishment.

It's important to note that problem behaviour may develop over time and conversely take time to undo. Using positive reinforcement training is not a quick fix but will provide long term behaviour change when consistency of the method is used. There are no such things as 'quick fixes' in dog training.

So what do we do with behaviour we don't like?

Ignoring

Behaviours like jumping up, attention-seeking barking, throwing the ball back at you and barking constantly to get you to play, nuzzling your arm for a pat, scratching at the door to be let in etc. will be repeated if they are rewarded, for example, with attention. Sometimes even scolding (a form of negative attention) ends up as a reward and so inadvertently encourages the behaviour.

If your dog is doing something you don't like, do not give them the reinforcement they are seeking, ignore them instead - perhaps get up and move away. Don't just endlessly ignore them as your only strategy though, you also need to plan something more effective for managing the behaviour in the future. Ignoring does not give your dog information on what else they could be doing or what you might want them to do, so dogs that are ignored (as opposed to actively trained) can become more confused and frustrated.

It is true that behaviours that are ignored will diminish, but this also includes *desirable* behaviours if you forget to randomly reward them. So look for ways to include rewards in your training strategy as well.

Interrupting

If you really don't want the behaviour to happen at all, you can interrupt your dog and ask them to do something else instead – something that's acceptable, in place of the unwanted behaviour. If your dog is barking at your neighbours across the fence, you could go up to them, call their name, ask them to follow you back to the house and then provide them with an alternative activity like a food-dispensing toy, or simply bring them inside to be with you. Either way, the new activity means they can't continue practising the annoying barking behaviour, and you also are now actively training them because you're rewarding a different and incompatible behaviour. If you do this consistently, eventually you will be able to call your dog away from barking with ease. (You should also teach them to reliably come to you when called, as a separate general exercise).

Redirecting

Sometimes dogs perform behaviours that we don't mind, but in a place we don't approve of. Digging holes may be perfectly fine in a purpose-built sandpit, but you probably don't want it to happen randomly throughout your garden. By consistently redirecting behaviours to a more suitable area – such as a digging pit, you can allow your dog to express their natural behaviours, but in an acceptable way.

Training an alternative, acceptable behaviour

If you train a new behaviour that's incompatible to a behaviour you don't like, you can teach your dog an alternative, acceptable way of acting that avoids the original problem. For example, if your dog jumps up



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attention they want. Another example is if your dog runs to the front door and barks whenever they hear the doorbell – you could teach them to go to their mat whenever they hear the doorbell, to receive a tasty chew.

Management of Resources

It is very easy for us as owners to manage our dogs if we remember that everything of value to them comes from us. By controlling access to resources we can choose where and how we give rewards, and that will help us teach our dogs the behaviours we want. What's valuable will vary from dog to dog, but some of the most common things dogs will want from you include:

- **Your attention** – Your rule might be that your dog needs to have all four paws on the floor, eg. in a stand, sit or drop position, before you give them attention.
- **Walks** - You can set up a rule that if the lead is loose, you will walk, but if the lead becomes tight, you stop.
- **Food** – You might have a rule that your dog is never fed from a bowl – but rather has to earn food through combination of a food dispensing toys or as rewards in daily training. Dogs that have access to food all the time might become overweight or fussy with food (also health issues can be missed), and food presented in a bowl represents many lost opportunities to deliver the calories as training rewards.
- **Toys** – You might have certain toys that you only bring out when you want to interact with your dog, and then put away so they aren't destroyed. This lets you play with your dog when you feel like it, rather than being cajoled into play by insistent behaviour. You can also occasionally ask your dog to do something for you before you throw a toy, like sit, drop or wait, for example – this is a great way to help your dog learn self-control.
- **Comfortable places to sleep** – If your dog is displaying concerning behaviour like growling or snapping when on the couch or bed, you might change where their sleeping area is. Move them to a soft bed in the laundry, or perhaps even crate train them, and prevent them from accessing the couch or bed again or train them to go to a mat.
- **Access to indoors** – You can ask that your dog sit quietly and wait at the doorway before you give them the ok to come inside. A caution that this should be trained when your dog is calm, not when they're over-excited because you just arrived home.
- **Play with you or another dog** – You may require your dog to walk nicely on a lead before being allowing them into the dog park – or you may ask for a sit before being allowed to play with their friends.

If your dog growls or snaps at you or protects any objects in their possession, then they may be "resource guarding". If this is a problem for you, please discuss it with your Pet Professional Guild Australia instructor.

Overdependence

It can become a problem if you include your dog into every family activity. If your dog spends almost all their time with their people and does not experience independent time, they will never learn to be comfortable being alone.

Dogs, much like children need us to “cut the apron strings” at times so they can explore, grow in confidence and learn to cope on their own when necessary. Remember to give your dog independent time. Have them go outside with an activity to do like playing in a sandpit, eating dinner from a food dispensing toy, or chewing a bone etc. whilst you remain inside. This will help your dog to cope better being alone when you are not at home. Don't shut your dog away or outside if they are not choosing to do these activities when the door is open. Choice is key in learning to be independent..

Comings and goings

Making your departures and arrivals home low key, will help your dog to settle much quicker. When you first come home calmly acknowledge them, then perform some household tasks until they are relatively quiet and calm. They need to learn that your coming home is not such a big deal and they will get attention when you are ready. Ensure when you leave the house you don't over-fuss either. Instead of smothering them with kisses and telling them you won't be long and you'll miss them, just walk out calmly. Remember to provide them with some things to do when you leave – like a special something to chew – and activities like a pre-prepared digging pit with “hidden treasures” ready for the finding. Don't save environmental enrichment for only when you are going out!

Summary

- I am focused on what I want from my dog and not complaining about what they do. I understand my dog can't expect to know what I want from them if I'm not teaching them.
- I am working with my dog's motivation as much as possible. I am not waiting for the problem to start before I manage it. For example, I can see a dog in the distance and I know my dog usually pulls on the lead when another dog gets closer, so I am going to ask my dog to give me eye contact and reward for that before the dog gets close.
- Our rules have been set and everyone is following the program no matter what.
- I am becoming the best doggy parent I can be, I am practicing pro-active intervention when I need to. I am always mindful of my dog's body language and I plan ahead to avoid problems. I am someone my dog can rely on at all times.
- I'm setting my dog up to succeed. I'm managing the environment and situations so they can't make a mistake when not supervised.
- I understand that whenever my dog is with me, we are 'in training' whether I want them to learn or not. I am always mindful that I train for what I want – not what I don't want.
- When my dog does not respond to me if I ask for a polite behaviour, I am removing what he wants. For example, attention from me, pats from me, a treat, being able to come inside, have his lead put on etc.

Management Do's.

- Agree on your house rules – and ensure everyone knows what they are.
- Identify what you think to be acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, eg. you may not be concerned if your dog gets a bit excited when you pick up your car keys or grab your leash, but jumping on the table for food or getting up on the couch might be unacceptable.
- Ensure you are proactive and decisive on the rules that matter – such as those that affect your dog's welfare (like being able to keep them contained), the family (food guarding or playing roughly) and the wider community (roaming, barking, soiling footpaths & parks, harassing people/animals/cyclists etc).
- Reward the behaviours you want and remember not to reward in any way behaviours you find to be inappropriate or undesirable.
- Above all, treat your dog with love and respect and you'll find the same from them in return.

Respect, Trust, Loyalty and Love are Given – NOT Taken or Demanded.