



Building a Relationship Before you Start Training.

It's not uncommon that people get a new dog or puppy and immediately enroll into a puppy obedience class at their local pet store. For many reasons I oppose this method of training, as I also, for the most part, oppose sending a dog off to board and train training. I will discuss this in other articles, but here I would like to address the basics of dog ownership.

The very first thing a dog needs when he is introduced into a new pack / family is structure. That structure depends on everything the dog experiences in the home. I should add that it makes little difference if this is a puppy or a full-grown dog. The very first thing is to give the dog a system of structure that he must follow when he is in your pack. This may sound cruel to some, but those are the people that let their dogs run off leash and eventually have to give their dogs up because they are out of control. I am in favor of giving a dog exactly what they need to be safe and happy... all of this begins with structure. The dog needs to know where he belongs and what is expected of him. He needs to know right from wrong, and NEVER be punished for doing something that he was not made aware was wrong and clearly understood it. This includes not "forcing" a dog to sit, stay, come heel, not correcting a dog for having an accident in the house, etc. FIRST you teach the dog what you want him to know, and then you make sure he knows what it is, then you may correct him if he is not following the rules. Corrections in the dog world do not involve emotion or carrying a grudge. You do not yell at a dog or stay mad after the correction has been made. You also should not coddle the dog afterwards, as this sends a very mixed signal to the dog.

Structure gives the dog permission to let down their guard and gives them a crystal clear picture of who is in charge. To start with, who feeds them and who walks them? These two things alone are huge in the mind of the dog. In the beginning, it is important that one person is responsible for this. It is not a good idea for the entire household to take turns doing this. Dogs work on a system of hierarchy, not equality. For at least 4-8 weeks the dog should see one person as the clear leader. This leader should be firm, fair and aloof. Dogs need structure before love. A dog that respects you will love you more than a dog that solely loves you. Dogs look to a leader for protection and guidance, but not

necessarily love. I have had plenty of emails and phone calls from people whose partners “always gave the dog love and affection” only to develop a dog that bites at some point. The best thing for a dog is to receive limited freedom in your house. Some people use crates, some find them wrong. I don’t have a problem with crating a dog for a few hours considering the dog has been properly crate trained. Just throwing a dog into a crate is down right cruel. The dog’s crate, if used, should be a place of happiness, peace and solace, NEVER punishment. When I bring a dog into my home I use a tether and the dog is never more than 10 feet away from me until I know I can trust them. This avoids accidents like peeing in the house, tearing up furniture, etc. Also, keeping the dog close to you builds the bond between you and the dog. Please read my other articles, they contain valuable information on bringing home new dogs and crate training.

The dog should always be walked on a leash, never running free. My dog is completely obedience trained and can walk off leash and will recall when called, but I still never walk my dog off of a leash, this is just plain careless. In the beginning, if you’ve followed the advice above, your dog will follow you, for the most part. If the dog pulls, you can give a slight correction, but not too firm. Use a praising voice when the dog is near you, and this alone will build some likelihood that the dog will walk closer to you. I also suggest you avoid too many distraction in the beginning. This includes other dogs, too many people, traffic, etc. Keep it simple for the dog to focus on you.

Your dog should see you eat and then be fed. I am also strongly opposed to people “testing” their dogs by taking their dogs food away while the dog is eating. This is not only stupid, but down right cruel to the dog. I suggest never removing the dog’s food while he is eating, and never putting your hand into the bowl while he is eating as well. This proves nothing other than you don’t know about pack structure. When the dog eats, let him eat. When he walks away from his food, remove the bowl until the next feeding. Do NOT leave food out for your dog. If you want to avoid food aggression consider hand-feeding your dog for a few weeks when you first get him (only if he’s not food-aggressive to start).

Dogs should not be allowed on furniture on their own accord. If you insist on having the dog on your furniture, it should not happen until he understands that he needs to be invited onto “your” furniture. Giving a dog too much freedom in the beginning will lead to an unruly dog or a dog that will become confused later when you start taking his freedoms away after he’s destroyed your furniture or bedding.

If you want to be a fair dog owner, always have things you can give your dog as his training and loyalty progress. If you give him everything in the beginning, he will not get rewards for his progress.

Many people who do not understand dogs, trainers included, make the mistake of putting human traits and emotions onto their dogs. If you really love your dog, you will educate yourself to learn how a dog thinks and what the dog needs to be happy. The single most important thing that will achieve this is structure. Structure, in the dog’s eyes, is as

important as food. If you'd consider it cruel to deprive your dog of food, then realize you may be doing the same by depriving him of structure.

Once the dog has a clear understanding of structure and builds a relationship with his human companion he can begin training. Training without a relationship will accomplish very little, and that what is does accomplish is not built out of respect. The dog may sit, come, heel or whatever, but he is not doing it out of solid groundwork. To be fair in training, you have to prove yourself as a fair leader. A dog will follow a fair and strong leader with vigor.

If it's your goal to build a relationship on love and understanding, take the time to build a solid groundwork with your dog before you begin training. Focus on training your dog personally and don't rely on sending him away for training. Get a trainer who will teach you how to work *with* your dog and will help you understand how to relate to your dog. The relationship with your dog will last his entire life. Making careless mistakes in the beginning will carry through the dog's entire life. A little planning is worth the results that it will create.

I use food/treats and toys in all training. It is a solid way to develop a relationship based on fairness and one that can be developed over the entire life of the dog. This relationship building is something I do from day one and throughout the dog's entire life.

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