The Pet Owner Guide to Choosing the Right Dog Training Class

Pet Professional Guild Educational Handout #6

Do you have a new dog/pup in the family? If you are reading this before you even get your new best friend, then you are on the right track. If you already have your dog start looking for a class now.

- **Choosing a Trainer:** Be selective. Your decision now will have consequences for your dog's future (see also Pet Professional Guild Educational Handout # 7: Choosing the Right Trainer for Your Dog)
- **School or Independent Trainer?** Decide if you want to work within the confines of a school or with an independent trainer. Neither is wrong – it depends on what suits you.
- **Insurance:** Make sure the school or trainer has at least third party insurance coverage**.**
- **Group or Private Training?** Try a couple of private lessons then join a group to see which suits you and your dog better. Nervous or reactive dogs may be better off starting out with a private trainer.
- **Location:** Credible dog training associations usually have a register of trainers. Pet shops, kennels, vets and other pet professionals may know of trainers in your area. Personal recommendations can be useful but be aware that advertisements and personal opinions may be inaccurate.
- **Research:** Visit several training schools without your dog to see what is offered. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Make sure you are happy with what they are teaching – and the methods used.
- **The Environment:** The environment should be safe, clean and appropriate for training both dogs and people. The atmosphere should be comfortable and friendly, and groups should be small.

- **The trainer:** A trainer should be:
  - Skilled, competent, smart, patient, encouraging, empathetic, kind, knowledgeable, cheerful, positive, fair, honest – but tactful, with a sense of humor and able to manage the group (or individual) professionally to make learning effective and fun.
  - Open to sharing knowledge and skills – but not overwhelming with science or jargon.
  - Treat clients fairly while catering to their individual needs.

Words a good trainer might use are:

- Partnership, positive, reward, reinforcement, praise, lifestyle, calm, learning theory, classical/operant conditioning, clicker/marker, cue, relationship and fun.

A trainer should not use:

- Force, coercion or aversive training equipment, a raised voice, pain, or instill fear in the dogs or students.

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- **Assistants:** Are assistants supportive of the trainer and vice versa? Look for a workable relationship between the two.
- **Qualifications/Accreditations/Memberships:** Ask to see qualifications, certificates, accreditations etc. Research any associations the trainer is a member of – not all recommend positive, force-free training like the Pet Professional Guild.
- **Experience:** Ask questions. Are they qualified? What is their level of experience? What is the nature of their education and experience? Which training ethos do they adhere to? Are they just starting out or have they been training for several years? What fields of working with dogs do they have experience in? Do they attend courses, seminars and conferences to keep abreast of current methods and trends?
- **Methods:** Training methods should be force-free and reward based and not endorse equipment or recommendations which may cause pain, fear or discomfort.
- **Delivery:** How does the trainer interact with people and dogs? Do they set both client and dog up for success? Is attention from the trainer and the assistants equally distributed? Is information – verbal or demonstrated – clear and easy to follow? Are questions answered effectively? Is there a time set aside at the end of the class for questions? Is everyone involved?
- **Aims:** Aims should be clearly defined. Pet/companion dog training is a complex subject in its own right and should not be confused with competitive obedience.
- **Atmosphere:** Dogs and people should appear interested and comfortable. Are they enjoying the training experience or do they look concerned or bored? Boredom adds to stress – learning should be as stress-free as possible. Disruptive behavior should be sensitively addressed and no owner/guardian should be left feeling demoralized, or embarrassed.
- **Equipment:** All equipment should be safe and in good working order. Equipment which punishes or causes harm should not be used or recommended. Good trainers recommend equipment such as plain flat collars (no chain or prong) and harnesses (with chest clip preferably). Look for written general handouts and handouts which support each lesson.
- **Outcomes:** When observing, look for progress. Results will not be identical for each dog/human partnership but each should show progress.
- **Cost:** Prices vary but cheap/expensive do not always mean bad/good. Research thoroughly.

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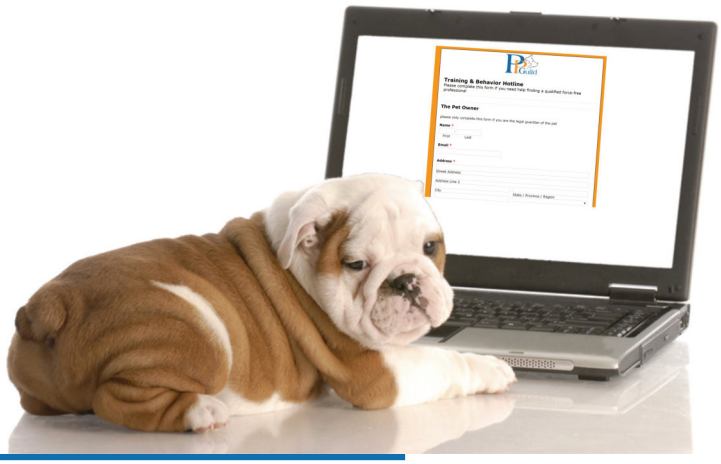

Pet dog owners should begin training and socializing their dog as soon as he/she joins the family. All training should be done in a positive manner using rewards based, scientifically sound training methods. Please consult the Pet Professional Guild's Directory to find a trainer in your area:
Pet Professional Guild Directory:
www.petprofessionalguild.com/PetGuildMembers.

To learn more about force-free training and humane, up-to-date, scientifically sound behavior modification and training methods, see www.petprofessionalguild.com

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