

Animal behaviour - animal training

Vicki Etherington

ABSTRACT

People's expectations of dog ownership are usually totally unrealistic. The majority of dog problems are due to lack of exercise and socialisation. The results of this can be seen in many different ways. The dogs can be destructive and dig holes, tear the washing off the line, wreck the garden, scratch at the back door, bark incessantly, be frightened or aggressive towards other dogs and people, or make a nuisance of themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Responsible dog ownership should be cultivated to encourage the general public to be more aware of the importance of dog ownership. Contrary to what some people think, dogs are exceptionally intelligent, and are the products of their environment. I don't know of anyone who has ever amounted to anything in life without some sort of education. Dogs are as bright as we allow them to be, and, in the correct hands, they are assets which guard your home, property and family. They are companions and friends for the sick and the lonely. Dogs help in the education of children and teach them to be caring and loving.

Many dogs are purchased for the wrong reasons with little or not thought for the dogs' welfare. These are the problem dogs of the future and in many cases 'an accident waiting to happen'. Most of our purchases in this day and age are not 'trouble free'. Money will need to be spent on your animal as an ongoing commitment to the idea that, as a great deal of thought has gone into the purchase of your investment, it is up to you and you alone to make sure that you don't end up with a problem dog.

THE DECISION TO BUY

Before you make a decision to own a dog remember to ask yourself a few honest questions:

- a. Do you really need or want a dog? Remember, a dog's life span is ten years or more.
- b. Are you prepared to exercise this dog daily - summer, winter, wind, rain, hail and heat - till death do you part?
- c. Can you afford to feed him and pay veterinary bills? You will have fees for yearly inoculations, possible desexing, and boarding fees should you wish to go on holidays.
- d. Will you brush the dog daily and bath it at least once a month?
- e. Will you clean up the yard every day and in general keep the area clean where the dog is kept?
- f. Will you wash the bedding regularly and air it whenever possible?
- g. Will you take him along to dog training classes so he becomes acceptable in society and not a nuisance to yourself and everyone else in the area?

THE CHOICE

If the answer to all these questions is 'Yes', then we are in business. Now, what sort of a dog is best for you? It is commonly considered that bitches are easier to handle than males. In fact, the best all round family pet and the easiest to look after is the desexed female. While men seem to prefer male dogs because they are stronger and more dominant, in most cases it is the women who look after the dogs. They may have problems controlling them because many male dogs have a macho outlook and may fight to prove they are top dog, having a roving eye for the bitches or, in general, may be difficult to handle.

If you choose a male of any breed remember to train him early and be one hundred per cent aware of what you have at the end of the lead at all times. The easiest dogs to train and handle, with a few exceptions, are from the gun dog and working dog groups. These dogs have been born and bred to work alongside man and to take direction.

You must also consider what you expect from a dog. When choosing a puppy it is madness to pick an active puppy if you have a quiet lifestyle. Similarly, there is no point in choosing a quiet puppy if you have an energetic lifestyle. Toy breeds are great for people in small homes or for the elderly, as they require little exercise. Also, certain dog breeds make better watchdogs than others. The training and obedience of your dog are important so that he is acceptable to the household. Utility and non-sporting groups have some breeds that are suitable for training but hounds and terriers can be hard work to train and a challenge because of their independent natures.

HOW TO BUY

Here are some useful tips:

- Buy a good book on dogs, their likes and dislikes and the lifestyle appropriate to each breed.
- Buy your puppy from a reputable breeder who will help you with follow-up advice.
- Ring the canine control authorities in your area for advice.
- Consult your local dog training club or dog trainer.
- Get advice from your local veterinarian or pet shop owner.
- If you buy from an animal shelter try to get a dog which is a working or gun dog crossbreed.

Do not buy a dog just because your children like it. Their likes and dislikes will come and go, and you will be left to look after the dog. It may as well be a breed *you* like and want. If you acquire a dog without thought or just because of its looks, you risk being bitterly disappointed. A dog in an unsuitable home may misbehave, become undisciplined or even aggressive.

If you don't intend breeding from the dog, have your dog desexed - bitches between 6-8 months and dogs at between 9-12 months of age. If you want to breed, but only for fun, you must realise that you won't make much money. It will be a lot of work and your puppies may not sell. Your bitch does not need to have a season nor a litter of pups before she is desexed. There are too many dogs destroyed each week at animal shelters because people have allowed their dogs to have a litter without any thought of the consequences.

Remember you must choose your friend to suit you and your lifestyle and be prepared to make a commitment to look after him for the rest of his life. Some examples of dog types:

Giant:	Great Dane	Newfoundland
Large:	Labrador Retriever	Golden Retriever
	German Shorthaired Pointer	Irish, English and Gordon Setters
	German Shepherd Rottweiler	Collie Rough
	Standard Poodle	Dobermann
	Boxer	Dalmatian
		Bernese Mountain Dog
Medium:	Springer Spaniel	Cocker Spaniel
	Border Collie	Kelpie
	Cattle Dog	Miniature Poodle
	Schnauzers	Shetland Sheep Dog
Small:	Cavalier King Charles Spaniel	Silkie Terrier
	Australian Terrier	Toy Poodle
	Miniature Pinscher	Corgi
Toy:	Yorkshire Terrier	Pomeranian
	Maltese	Papillon

THE FIRST STEPS

Just a few more things to consider:

- a. Try to purchase your puppy in the day time so he can explore his new surroundings before nightfall. Have a place set aside for him where he will not come to any harm when left alone. Barricade all stairways and areas where he may fall - a baby's play pen is excellent or a large dog crate, dog run or even the laundry .If he has access to any of these areas, he will go there to rest and get away from every one. Remember puppies, like babies, sleep a lot.
- b. Feeding puppies is not difficult. Puppies are fed 3 to 4 times a day initially. This can be reduced to three times a day up to six months of age and twice a day up to twelve months of age. Remember not to feed them chicken, chop, steak or Iamb bones. Marrow bones are good for large dogs and brisket bones for small dogs.
- c. Try to purchase your new dog while you are on holidays, so that you can spend some time with him and house train him very quickly. Keep in mind that dogs are pack animals and love company.
- d. To house train a dog you must be prepared to take him outside several times a day, especially after he has been asleep for some time or if he has had a drink within the past fifteen minutes. Stay with him while he goes to the toilet. You will then know that he has been, and you can use a word that he gets used to and understands to mean toilet. You must then praise him when he has finished.

Dogs as a rule do not soil their own sleeping area if they have a choice. If he is sleeping in a dog crate, be sure that he gets out often enough to go to the toilet. If he is locked in a play pen or laundry and you are not prepared to get up through the night, put some newspaper down away from his bed and he will use that. If he makes a mistake in the house, bring him to the accident, tap the floor near it to get his attention, say 'bad dog' and then take him outside to remind him where he should have gone.

TRAINING

All dogs should have the advantage of basic education. Dogs are smart! You must give them the opportunity to learn and not to become pests or first class thugs, bashing other dogs and mugging people.

Consistency: the greatest contribution that you will ever make to a dog's education is consistency! When you handle a dog, you have two squares, right and wrong with nothing in the middle - this means there are no grey areas.

The two main things to remember are:

1. Never ask a dog to do anything it is not capable of doing; and
2. Never ask a dog to do anything you cannot enforce or that will be score 'One' for the dog and 'None' for the handler!

EQUIPMENT

Don't forget the essential equipment - one check chain (the proper size, which is the size of the dog's neck plus 5 centimetres), one 2 metre lead and one six metre lead.

Check chain: This is not be left on the dog as a fixed collar and should be removed with the lead. This chain is not a toy. Read the instructions carefully on how to use it.

Fixed collar: A fixed collar should be left on the dog at all times with a council registration disk and an identification disk with name, address and phone number.

Six metre lead: This is used in training so that the dog can run and still be in your control so as to avoid loss or injury.

Remember that dogs learn through *repetition* - establish your commands and build a vocabulary of communication between yourself and the dog.

There are six basic stages to obedience - heel, sit, stand, stay, come and down.

1. **Heel**

The correct position is for the dog to walk nicely on the left hand side with the dog's shoulder in line with the trainer's left leg.

2. **Sit**

Sit is a stationary position. Whenever you stop, the dog sits.

3. **Stand**

Stand is essential for control in either the sit, the stand or the down.

4. **Stay**

Stay is essential for control in either the sit, the stand or the *down*.

5. **Come**

Come is a command which might save a dog's life. The dog that does not come when he is called is dead.

6. **Down**

Down is the long term stay position.

Important: one command only is given for any action at anyone time. Several commands for one action encourage a dog to think his handler is not 'alpha dog'. Remember that you are the boss and he is the worker.

HOUSEHOLD COMMANDS - FOR EVERYDAY LIVING

Off

Use this command for the dog that jumps on to anything or anybody including yourself. Lift the knee and bump the dog in the chest.

Out

Out is self-explanatory - it means get out of anywhere the dog should not be. The command is followed by a large push.

Leave it

This means don't touch anything at all, including the chicken bone in the park.

No

No should be used only for an act of aggression.

Enough

Enough means 'cut it out'. It is your working word for control.

Free

Free is at ease, relax, either on or off the lead.

PROBLEM DOGS

1. Barking dogs

As a dog trainer and animal lover, there is nothing that annoys me more than a dog barking incessantly for no apparent reason. The first thing I always consider is why the dog is barking. Believe me, dogs don't bark without a reason. Remember, dogs are pack animals and were never meant to be left alone for long periods at a time. Many get bored and destructive, while others will just bark at anything that moves.

When a dog barks it is a form of communication, just as people talk to each other. Barking can be for many different reasons: happiness, aggression, warning or playing are just a few. Pened dogs, or dogs that are tied up, will bark because they are unhappy.

Dogs will also bark at other dogs or at strangers because they come near their front fence - this is a territorial warning, a 'don't come near my home' bark. Yet, people will get angry at being startled by a barking dog behind a fence and will kick out at the dog or throw stones, sticks or whatever they can pick up. Such behaviour only teases the dog and makes him worse. You usually find that if you ignore the dog, as soon as you have gone, he will stop barking. You have come near his home and he feels he is doing a job. If you have a dog that barks when in front of your house at certain times during the day, move him to the back or bring him inside during busy periods. When people ring the front door bell, it is normal for a dog to bark a warning. A cat sitting on the fence may be baiting the dog which in turn, will stand and bark at it. Quickly go outside, reprimand the dog and remove the cat from the fence.

These are just some of the more common causes: now, let's look at prevention.

A well exercised dog which has attended obedience training has a better socialised outlook and comprehension of noise.

Try to make sure your dog has access indoors or to a comfortable dry area such as a laundry or garage. A radio left on is excellent company. A giant sized marrow bone will also occupy a lonely dog's time.

Another alternative worth consideration is a companion for a lonely dog. You can always give a good home to a stray from an animal shelter and the upkeep of another dog is not such a heavy burden on the family finances.

Remember, dogs have very acute hearing. You don't have to shout to get the message across. Some people try to frighten their dogs out of barking. These are often people who have outdoor dogs for protection or guard work. But when someone does break in, the dog may not bark for fear of verbal or physical abuse and consequently, they have defeated the purpose of dog ownership.

Further, any such short cuts in training can be costly, unsuccessful in the long term and detrimental to the dog's psychological health. Imagine someone frightening the life out of you every time you opened your mouth. If we all started shouting at each other imagine what a discordant world it would be.

Ownership of a dog is great but like most things worthwhile, you only get back what you put in. Understanding the dog is important. Investigate any problem, find the cause and eliminate it. Don't leave your dog at home alone when you go away, unless someone is occupying your home and understands your pet. There are excellent boarding kennels available. You must always make your investigations early for the one suitable for your dog, where he will be looked after, and not left at home to annoy the neighbourhood through boredom.

Most neighbours are pleased to have dogs in the area that are well looked after, as an occasional bark gives them a feeling of security .

Ask yourself - how many people are attacked while walking dogs? How many houses are robbed, in which the dog has access to the full surroundings?

To find and eliminate the cause is the best solution to solving any problem in the long term.

2. Wanderers and owner responsibility

Do you say: 'My dog's a wanderer, it's cruel to keep him locked up!' Yet, if your dog is left to roam the streets, it can be picked up by the council, hit by a car, injured or killed. Remember this, if your dog causes an accident, you could be held liable. If your dog wanders, it will defecate on people's lawns and on public walkways. This is unpleasant for all and there is a hefty fine applicable, which councils will enforce.

When walking your dog in streets and parks, carry a small plastic bag and pick up after your dog. We all complain when we step in dog 'poo' yet there are so many lazy and ignorant people who let their dogs defecate, turn a blind eye and hurry on.

3. Dogs out of control

Don't let your out-of-control dog 'mug' adults and children in public parks. How many times have you heard the phrase 'Don't worry, he won't hurt you!' or 'He doesn't bite!' while the dog is knocking the child to the ground or making the adult filthy with big muddy paws. These phrases are used because the dog is out of control and won't come when it is called. If this is the case, begin using the long lead again and don't let the dog run loose until he is demonstrably under control and will come when he's called.

4. Aggression

Did you know that the most aggressive dogs are man-made? Remember the following:

- A. Buy a dog from a reputable breeder. You can obtain the necessary information from the Canine Council in your state. Don't buy
- the bully in the litter -the puppy that is always 'bashing up' its litter mates - as it will try to maintain its rank in the pecking order when it moves in with your family;
 - the hyperactive puppy that is always on the go if you want a quiet family pet;
 - the shy cowering 'standoffish' puppy as it may become a 'fear biter'.
- B. Always ask the breeder's advice and make sure you tell the breeder exactly what you want, you are looking for the well-adjusted, happy, friendly, sleepy, easy-going baby that will fit into your household.

Some other tips:

- Make sure that you hand feed your dog every now and again to get him used to you handling his feed, as some dogs become aggressive around food.
- No rough house playing - those 'slap and push' games are out. Rather, play constructive educational games, for example, ball and frisbee retrieving.
- Socialisation plays a very large part in a dog's life.

The surest way to have an aggressive dog is to keep him on a chain in the backyard, keep him locked in the backyard without a view of the outside world, or leave your gate open so that he can roam the street, 'bash up' the neighbourhood dogs and overturn garbage bins, stop people walking past his house and in general just be a nuisance.

Some breeds are more aggressive than others. You must buy carefully.

DOG ATTACKS

Surveys indicate that the majority of dog attacks have occurred due to some sort of provocation. Believe me, very few dogs just walk up and bite you! People tend to want to make friends with or pat stray dogs. On the other hand, they may be frightened and want to chase away the dog with arms flapping or throwing sticks and stones and making loud noises. This will often startle the dog and make it aggressive. People can sometimes be seen walking with streets carrying riding whips or large sticks to ward off dogs running out of open gateways. It is far better to ignore the dog or cross the road, than mounting a 'full on attack'. Some dogs when threatened just don't 'back off'.

Children should be supervised at all times with dogs. They should not be allowed to go into people's backyards and pat dogs. They should be taught to ask before approaching dogs. The general rule is, don't touch a dog that is not supervised. When children are bitten I always ask 'Where were the parents?' The best tip I can give in these circumstances, is to ignore other people's dogs and leave them alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vicki Etherington
15 Wallace Street
Waverley NSW 2024
Ph. (02) 399 7629

I work as a dog trainer and specialise in problem dogs. I deal in all aspects of obedience, show, tracking and guard work. I started training dogs when I was only eight years old. By the age of ten years, I was competing in obedience trials and instructing at the Eastern Suburbs Dog Training Club. At fourteen, I had gained the Kennel Control Instructors' Licence and at twenty three the Novice Judges' Licence. I currently hold Open, Utility, Tracking, Agility and Gun Dog Obedience Licences, as well as being on the approved list of Junior Showmanship judges. This latter is my favourite event as I competed in it so much as a child. I have owned and trained several breed and obedience champions. I am invited to judge dogs regularly throughout Australia and judged the Dog Obedience section at the 1993 Royal Easter Show. I have also appeared on many television programs relating to dogs and training. I write articles for newspapers and magazines and regularly conduct dog training seminars throughout Australia.

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