

Obedience Training

Obedience commands allow you to teach a dog desirable behavior in any given situation. Practicing obedience skills with your dog is also good exercise for your dog and provides it with mental stimulation. In addition, your dog enjoys constructive social interaction, for which it is rewarded with your praise. Skills should be practiced everywhere, in your home and beyond.

When to begin training

- The best time is the moment you get your pet. Behavior learned early, desirable or not, is the basis for all future patterns as an adult. This does not mean that adult dogs are untrainable; however, appropriate habits should be instilled from the start regardless of your pet's age.
- Once your pet is protected by the basic inoculations against common puppy diseases, puppy classes provide essential training for you and your pup.

Basic obedience commands

- Five basic commands can be applied to set the limits for acceptable behavior in a variety of situations: sit, down, come, heel and stay.
- Issue the command the same way each time to avoid confusion. This is particularly important when your dog is first learning to connect your command with an expected action. Always say "come," not "come over here" or "come here." Use the command alone, rather than including it in the middle of a sentence.
- Precede each command by saying the dog's name in a firm but gentle tone. If the command word is not preceded by the dog's name, the animal may not realize that you are addressing it.
- Say any commands in a firm and low tone. You need not shout to make yourself understood to make your dog understand that you are in charge. In fact, raising your voice may only frighten the dog or raise its level of excitement.
- Exhibit a calm but controlled attitude, conveying authority without anger. There is one exception. The command to "come" should be said in a light and happy tone of voice. Your dog must never anticipate any problems when you call it to come to you, or it could start avoiding you.
- Inform all family members or other frequent visitors of your rules. Everyone should act consistently to avoid confusing the animal.

Hand signals

Consistent use of a gesture in conjunction with a verbal command can be a useful addition to basic training. In hearing-impaired and congenitally deaf dog, hand signals can replace verbal commands. By making the hand signal each time you pronounce the corresponding voice command, your dog will eventually make the association between the signal and its behavior response.

Additional commands

- Once your dog has learned the basics, you can add commands. Such commands could include “jump” or “off” (to get off the furniture), “hurry” or “do it” (for bathroom time), “drop it” or “leave it” (for play). Make sure new commands are distinct from each other and consistent in form so that your dog will not become confused.
- Release commands let your dog know when it is acceptable to be at ease. For example, every dog should be taught to sit calmly before it is fed. The dog should be taught to sit calmly before it is fed. The dog should not touch its food dish until you release it from “sit/stay” with the command “okay.”

Praise

- At your dog’s first sign of obedience to your command, offer immediate and generous praise. Do not wait until after your pet has complied. Praise the dog as it begins to obey your command to help the dog associated your command with that action. If you delay or don’t praise, your dog might not understand what is expected of it.
- Praise may be verbal, such as softly saying “good dog.” Your tone of voice should be soothing. If you excitedly praise your dog for a successful “sit/stay,” your dog will respond to your excitement and break out of its position to jump at you. You also can pat the dog on the head.
- A food treat can help improve a dog’s motivation to cooperate, but they should not be continually used, particularly for pups. Food treats may help motivate a recently acquired adult dog.

Collar and Leash

Nylon or leather collars are adequate for many dogs. For dogs that pull, consider an Emily Weiss Walkie, which can be purchased at Tri-County Humane Society’s store in the front lobby. (All proceeds go back to the animals.)

For training sessions, a short training leash is beset. A longer leash of 4 to 6 feet can be used if you can control the slack. Retractable leads are awkward and difficult to firmly grip, and provide little control for training.

Daily Training Sessions

- During the initial phase of obedience training, you should practice obedience commands in one or two daily obedience training sessions of 15 to 30 minutes each. During these formal training sessions, practice the five basic commands in every room of your home.
- Use a leash at first during indoor obedience reviews so your dog will be more compliant and understand that you are in control. Once your dog is more reliably obedient, you will not need to use the leash inside your home.
- Practice obedience commands during walks outside. This will teach your dog obedience everywhere, regardless of distractions.
- Do not feed, walk, brush or play with the dog without asking it to perform an obedience skill. For example, if your dog follows you into the kitchen, call it to “heel” as it walks by your side. Tell it to “sit/stay” as you prepare your snack. Return to your place and call your dog out of its “sit/stay” in the kitchen by calling it to “come” to rejoin you in the other room. Make the dog “sit/stay” before its food dish is delivered. Make it “sit/stay” while you remove its leash.
- Obedience skills must be practiced throughout a dog’s lifetime so the skills are not lost. View every episode of misbehavior as an opportunity to teach obedience. Do not just scold your dog when it misbehaves. Rather, show it a desirable alternative activity by giving it a command, such as “down/stay.”

Professional Training

- Obedience training by professional trainers can be a positive experience for both you and your dog. A competent dog trainer can correctly demonstrate the skills that you, the owner, must use to communicate your desires to your dog. The purpose of a dog trainer is to teach you how to train your pet.
- Group classes also are beneficial because your dog can learn skills in a very distracting situation. If it can demonstrate obedience while surrounded by other dogs and other people in an unfamiliar location, the training should be easier to transfer (with ongoing practice at home) to relatively calmer places.
- Do not send your pet away to be trained. The purpose of an obedience trainer is to train you so you can train the dog. You are the one who must function from day to day with your dog; it must be trained to obey you.
- To locate an obedience trainer or training classes in your area, consult your veterinarian or call Tri-County Humane Society at 320-252-0896. And remember, no recommendation can replace a personal visit to the location of the class.