

Harnessed to Hope



Northern Breed Rescue

www.nbrescue.com

Why Should I Train My Dog?

Many people's idea of dog ownership is "A dog is a dog, how hard can it be?" However, it entails a lot more than just providing food, water, a collar, and putting a dog in a yard by itself.

Dogs are social animals. In the wild, canine society consists of a pack. Domestic canines also need a pack, whether it consists of other dogs or people. Wild canines get their exercise naturally by hunting, roaming and migrating. Domestic dogs rely on their human packs to provide them with exercise and activity. Without a pack or sufficient exercise a dog can become lonely, bored and unsocialized, which can lead to more serious problems.

Like humans, dogs need close relationships and companionship to be happy and content. Dogs (and their wild relatives, wolves) have never lived alone. Although they may sometimes hunt alone, these animals always return to their packs for companionship, leadership and safety. Packs have a structured society with a hierarchy, and wild canines learn the rules of their society and where they are in the hierarchy from their pack members. Domestic dogs learn some of the rules of canine society from their mother and littermates; it is up to their human pack members to teach them the rules of our human society that are essential to their survival. For more information on how puppies learn from their mother and littermates, see Suzanne Clothier's article ["It Takes a Pack to Raise a Puppy"](#).

There are many rules of human society that dogs need to learn and follow in order to survive:

- In most places, dogs cannot just run free at will. Most jurisdictions require owners to keep their dogs confined to their own property, and to have the dog on a leash or under control when off of their own property.
- The world is becoming more crowded with each passing year. There are now more people and more dogs sharing a smaller amount of space – more people live in apartments, condominiums and townhouses. This makes it even more important for dogs to be well socialized and have good manners.
- Many jurisdictions have noise ordinances – a dog that barks or howls continually can be reported as a nuisance.

- Dogs must be able to get along with people, other dogs, and to at least not attack neighbor's cats. Most dogs are not born with these skills.
- Dogs must learn to use a crate or to not chew up furniture and clothing when left alone in the house. Millions of dogs are surrendered to shelters and rescues each year because they damaged the house or furniture.
- Dogs must learn to behave while in the car and at the vet's office. Most states require that all dogs have a current rabies vaccination at all times – breaking this law can result in large fines, and confiscation and quarantine of the dog.
- If a dog does get out or escapes from its yard, the owner is liable for any damage or injury the dog causes while it is loose. Loose dogs are in danger from other animals, other dogs, in danger of attacking and killing cats (which can result in the dog being euthanized) and are at risk of being hit by cars or lost.

As you can see, there are several very good reasons to invest the time, money and energy into training your dog. Dogs of all ages can benefit from training, even senior dogs.

If you feel frustrated with your dog's behavior, remember that the dog needs someone to teach him what acceptable behavior is. A dog that has not been given any instructions, training or boundaries can't possibly know what you expect him to do. Teaching your dog how you want him to behave will save you a lot of stress and frustration and result in a healthier and happier dog.

A Well Trained Dog:

- Allows you to touch every part of his body to check for injury or illness and to give him medication.
- Has good manners, so he can spend most of his time indoors with his human pack, which means more companionship, less boredom and fewer opportunities to get into trouble. The more time you spend with your dog, the more likely you will be to notice when something is wrong, such as a limp, a cough, a painful area or loss of appetite. By recognizing such things early, you can get your dog to the vet quickly and hopefully prevent more serious problems.
- Wants to stay near you, listening for instructions (and praise). This means he will have less opportunity to get into trouble.
- Will walk or run beside you on a leash without pulling, dragging or strangling, so you and your dog can get more exercise and spend more time together.
- Knows that "drop it" and "leave it alone" are phrases that mean business, so he will have fewer opportunities to swallow dangerous objects. He also can be taught what things and places are out of bounds, like hot stoves, heaters or anxious cats. However, you will still need to limit his access to dangerous places when you cannot supervise or instruct him.

- Will “sit” reliably, simply because you say so. This can be very important if your dog ever manages to dash out the door, or the leash becomes unclipped and your dog is heading toward the street.
- Knows what you expect of him, knows what the rules are and has few anxieties. Less stress means a calmer and healthier dog.

By training your dog you can help prevent problems and develop a better relationship with him. Keep in mind that even a well trained dog needs supervision, instruction and boundaries – including physical boundaries.

Allowing a dog, no matter how well trained, to walk, run or roam loose outside of a fenced area or off of a leash is asking for trouble and putting the dog in danger.

Selecting a Trainer or Class

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers provides excellent tips for choosing a reputable dog trainer in their article “[How to Choose a Dog Trainer](#)”.

Here are some additional tips that are important to remember:

- Good training methods focus primarily on reinforcing good behavior and use correction sparingly, appropriately and humanely. Incorrect use of choke chains or pinch collars or using collars to lift dogs off of the ground (“stringing them up”), alpha rolling dogs, and physically forcing dogs to comply with commands are not appropriate or humane and can provoke aggressive responses from dogs.
- Good obedience instructors communicate well with people and with dogs and are good at teaching people how to train their dogs.
- If you are looking for help with specific problems, such as house soiling, barking, aggression or separation anxiety, ask if the course covers these issues.
- Ask the instructor what training methods are used and how they (the instructor and staff) were trained. Also, ask to observe a class or talk to past or current clients before you commit to one. If the instructor does not allow this, or if your observation results in anything that makes you uncomfortable, look somewhere else.
- Avoid anyone who guarantees his or her work; whose primary methods focus on punishment; or who wants to take your dog and train him for you (effective training must include you and the environment in which you and your dog interact).

We would be glad to check with our volunteers to see if they can recommend any trainers in your area. Just email hthnbr@gmail.com to ask. You can also search for trainers who are members of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers [here](#).

*Kerry Rice
Harnessed to Hope Northern
Breed Rescue Behavior Team*