

Is it important to train my dog? What sort of training would you recommend?

Training is an important part of any dog's life, and is important for several reasons. It provides mental stimulation which helps to keep your dog happy, and if combined with morning exercise your dog will be mentally and physically tired at the end and far more likely to sleep during the day.

The RSPCA supports reward-based training methods whereby the dog is set up to succeed and then rewarded for performing the 'good' behaviour (positive reinforcement).

Reward-based training is enjoyable for the dog and positively enhances the relationship between the dog and handler. This approach revolves around positive reinforcement - i.e. rewarding behaviour that we like. Rewards may be in the form of a tasty food treat or verbal praise such as "good dog!" in a pleasant tone of voice, to be given when the dog performs the 'good' behaviour.

Reward-based training also involves generally ignoring any 'unwanted' behaviours. In this way, the dog is not rewarded for any unwanted behaviour. If dogs are not rewarded (i.e. receives no attention or treats) for a certain behaviour, then they tend to stop doing it. For example if a dog is jumping up to greet people they should be ignored if they jump up and only receive attention (including eye contact) when they have four paws on the ground. Only when they are standing or sitting should they be rewarded with attention and treats.

Sometimes if owners react to 'unwanted' behaviour by yelling or getting angry they may inadvertently reinforce the behaviour - dogs perceive this as attention and the 'unwanted' behaviour is simply reinforced. For some dogs, any form of attention/reaction from the owner is better than no reaction at all. For example, if an owner shouts at a dog who is barking excessively, the dog may interpret this as getting attention and thus the barking continues whereas it is more effective to try to ignore this behaviour.

Aversion therapy or physical punishment must not be used in training programs. Punishing a dog for 'unwanted' behaviour can actually exacerbate the problem.

We highly recommend booking your puppy into puppy school classes, which are an important way of socialising your puppy with other dogs. Your puppy can then use this practice and learning when they meet other dogs at the park or on walks as they grow into adult dogs. Puppies have a 'critical socialisation period' from about 3-17 weeks of age. This is the time when they need to socialise with other dogs in order to learn social cues and how to communicate well with other dogs.

For dogs that are no longer in the puppy stage, training classes are offered in most areas. RSPCA recommends classes that use reward-based training that revolves around positive reinforcement as the basis of training. For more information please see [AVA Reward-based Training](#).

Anyone who adopts from the RSPCA is strongly encouraged to incorporate training for the well-being of their dog. In addition, all our communication activities encourage other dog owners to do the same as part of our responsible pet ownership campaign.

Article ID: 16

Last updated: 12 Dec, 2014

Revision: 6

Companion animals -> Dogs -> Behaviour -> Is it important to train my dog? What sort of training would you recommend?

<http://kb.rspca.org.au/entry/16/>