

HELPING A RESCUE DOG

Dogs live in a world dominated by humans. The dogs that come to live with us have to learn our "rules and regulations" fast, or already know them! This will vary from household to household, being on furniture, sleeping on owner's beds, pulling on the leash, toilet training to mention just a few. Each dog will have to learn our language and obey about 50 commands in its lifetime; no matter what language we speak. Yet we send our own offspring to school for years to be able to speak and understand our own language.

Dogs communicate primarily through body language yet I wonder how many humans understand the dog's language or there rules and regulations of the canine world? It can become a very one-sided relationship when we look it like this.

Rescue dogs have often found themselves looking for new homes through no fault of their own. Separations of the family, death or nobody bothering to teach them are common causes. The last thing they need is to go into another home that has no understanding of them, yet wants them to understand our human world.

Often people will feel sorry for a rescue dog and may start by taking a week off work to help it settle in, taking it for enjoyable walks and playing games. But this only increases the dogs stress levels, as this routine cannot be kept up indefinitely and the owner will return to normal life, leaving the dog wondering what on earth happened!

It is far better to start as you mean to go on and get the dog use to living with you on a day to day basis. Do not fall into the trap of feeling sorry for the dog because it was a rescue and trying to make it's past better, as we cannot do this. It has a wonderful future in a new and loving home, if you wish to feel sorry for anything then feel sorry for the rescue dogs left behind.

How to go forward positively.

To have a good relationship with your dog, based on love, respect and understanding you need to build on this gradually. I like to use food, toys and love and attention to enhance and build this relationship, as these are things dogs enjoy and need in life.

Most dog's love food, but if they get this for doing nothing, then this is what it will mean to them – nothing. If you use the food you feed your

dog to reward new behaviors from him, then he is earning this food just as you and I do daily when we go out to work and expect wages. You will probably want to give him a new name or teach him to come when called and you cannot expect him to want to do these things for nothing. So, by using some of his main food or leftover's from your meal will help him to learn these things and build up a good relationship as this food is now being earned in a rewarding way.

Some dog's love toys, whilst others show little interest due to the fact that nobody has ever taught them how to play with toys. It can take some patience on your part to do this, but is very much rewarded later in life when your dog wants to be with you and his favorite toy, rather than rushing off to do his own thing on walks!

Look at what type of dog you have, as it will have been bred to do a job and this job will give it an "instinctive behavior". By this I mean a Border Collie for example was bred to herd and chase sheep, so its instinct is to chase! If it does not learn how to chase suitable toys then its "chase instinct" will be on chasing inappropriate things like cars, joggers or cyclists! Terriers were bred to go down holes and kill small furry animals, so they will often like soft squeaky toys as the animal they are hunting is usually soft and certainly squeaks. There is a toy for every breed, so take the time to learn what your dog enjoys doing most.

Keeping these special toys out of your dog's reach and getting them out daily for a good game will ensure they keep your dogs interest more. Where as if you leave them lying around or give the dog free access t them, they can become boring to your dog and then he may favor sticks, stones or other dogs to play with on walks as he does not get these all the time.

Chew toys should always be available for your new dog, after all you do not know much about his history and certainly do not wish to find out he enjoys chewing on your furniture or personal items. A toy called a Kong can be a wonderful chew toy as it can be stuffed with some food to make it more appealing. *Nylabone* and *Gumabone* products are also safe chew toys for your dog. Some dogs prefer to chew soft articles whilst others prefer harder articles, so supplying your dog with both is a good idea in the early stages. *Nylabone* is harder and *Gumabone* is softer.

It is very important that when you see your dog chewing one of these toys, that you immediately reward the dog with your attention. Most

dogs that have become destructive have learnt that chewing the toys do not get their owner's attention, but chewing the remote control television box or kitchen cabinets certainly do. Although this maybe negative attention from the owners, it is still attention and will make the dog increase the unwanted behavior.

Your dog may enjoy loving and petting and constantly come up to you for this. If he is demanding this on his terms and you are merely complying, then you will not be able to reward your dog with your love and affection as he gets this a hundred times a day indoors for doing nothing. So is not about to do a "sit" or come when called for it!

You do not love your dog any less, in fact you can love him even more, but just make sure it is not always on his terms. If he demands some attention, ask him to do something first, like a Sit or Give a Paw or anything he knows and does well. This is canine manners, like us saying "please". Other times you call him over for some love and attention. This way you can love him even more and he will see it as something special just like you do!

You will find by doing these simple things and making him aware of food, games with toys and love and attention, your training and relationship with your dog will get even better.

We also need to remember that attention to a dog is "looking at him", "speaking to him" and "touching him". Doing any of these three things will be rewarding a behavior in your dogs eyes and a **rewarded behavior always increases.**

So, if your dog is sitting beside you and you look, touch or speak, you have rewarded this behavior and it will increase. On the other hand if your dog jumps up at you and you look, touch or speak, you have rewarded this behavior and this will now increase. Just because one was praise and one was reprimand it can make no difference, it will keep the behavior going whether you wanted it or not! So, if possible ignore unwanted behavior and show your dog what you want, then reward this with your attention.

Many rescue dogs have not had a good relationship with humans and have found that to gain there attention they need to do unwanted behaviors, as when they were being good they got ignored and ignored behavior decreases. But when they displeased there owner they got attention and any attention is better than none at all!

Housetraining is often another important aspect when acquiring a new dog. Some dogs that have been in kennels for some time will need your patience, as they have been use to a kennel and run, not a house and garden. Others will feel very insecure when coming into your home for the first time, as nothing smells familiar to them so they cannot relax. They may then toilet in the house, so that something does smell familiar and they can settle more easily.

I am a great believer in helping the dog to get things right, so we always visit the garden before the house and wait until the dog has toileted before going indoors. I use a child's stair-gate indoors until I know the dog is housetrained, this way I can supervise access within the home and keep an eye on the dog, so therefore setting him up to be more successful at what I am teaching him.

He will need to go into the garden to relieve himself after a sleep, eating or if you see him circling and sniffing. You should accompany your dog into the garden and stay with him for a couple of minutes. If during this time he toilets, make sure you praise him and give him a tasty treat within a few seconds of him doing this. If he has not gone, then bring him back indoors and wait 20 minutes, unless you see him circling and sniffing again, before repeating the procedure.

If he has an accident indoors it is very important not to reprimand this, do not even show displeasure on your face! If the dog has toileted in front of you, then it just needs basic housetraining. But if it has sneaked off and toileted in the house and you did not see this, then this dog has been reprimanded for toileting indoors and it will take a little more patience on your part to overcome this. When we reprimand a dog for toileting indoors we think we are teaching him not to go indoors, but to go in the garden. In fact all the dog learns is not to go when you are present, which makes life very awkward!

By using a child's stair-gate your dog will not be able to sneak off and toilet and you will be able to supervise him and teach him how to get this right. If he does toilet indoors you **must** ignore it, you have missed the signs. Do not even clear up in front of the dog and when you wash the area use one part biological washing powder to four parts warm water as this will eliminate the scent. Many disinfectants have ammonia-based products which will enhance the scent and your dog will want to repeat toileting in these areas.

Now your dog is getting 100% attention and his scent outside, but nothing inside. You will soon find he chooses to go outside to toilet.

Lastly many rescue dogs can become insecure and then over attached to their owners, which leads to separation anxiety. Separation anxiety is when you cannot go out and leave your dog as he either barks or chews your house up!

It is therefore very important not to let this develop, but to keep a good and healthy relationship instead.

By teaching our dogs that they do not need to follow us from room to room within the home is a great help in making them relax, settle and not get separation anxiety. I start this straight away by using the stair gate and settling my dog in the room I will be leaving him in. I give him something tasty to chew, like a stuffed Kong or Marrow Bone and then put him in this room with the stair-gate closed, so he can see me but cannot follow me. I may now go and make the beds upstairs or do something in another part of the house for 10 minutes, then come down and let him out again. I build this up daily until he is happy to go in this room for between 20-35 minutes whilst I am doing other things in the home, as I cannot leave him and go out if he cannot handle this with me indoors.

Dogs that follow owners from room to room are often very insecure, they cannot even relax fully when all the family are together in one room. They worry that one of the family may leave that room and the dog must follow, even if you are only going to the bathroom. This causes a tremendous amount of stress and is terribly unfair on the dog, if he cannot relax about you walking from room to room without following, just imagine how he will be when you go out.

If you find you are suffering with more severe problems then it is best to seek the help of your veterinarian who will be able to determine whether it is a physical or behavioral problem and if the latter refer to you an experienced behaviorist and trainer. Do not try using punishment to overcome problems as this will cause resentment and break down the relationship you are building up with your dog. Punishment is rarely as successful as we would like to think and a more intelligent approach will bring greater benefits and a quicker answer to the problems.

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