

Whether you want to develop your dog's skills for competition, teach him to perform a particular service, or just want a well-behaved pet, selecting the right trainer and the right training technique may be critical to your success. Approaches to dog training have changed significantly over the past twenty years. Most mainstream trainers now use very few aversive correction methods and more and more are using reward-based or positive reinforcement training methods. Innovations in equipment also provide more humane ways to gain control of your dog during the training process.

What dog training programs are available?

There are three approaches to basic obedience training for dogs: group class, private lessons or board and train. A full service pet care facility usually offers all three. The following is an overview of each:

Group class is by far the most economical way to get the information you need for training your dog. For a fee, trainers usually offer a set of 5 to 8 classes (an hour each week) during which you are instructed by the trainer on how to train your dog. Group class offers dogs an opportunity to socialize with other dogs if the trainer allows interaction between friendly dogs. An adequate group class for a good trainer is about 10-12 dogs. In group class you share the trainer with your other classmates. If however you need more focused time with a trainer,

private lessons may be for you. Tip: Ask to audit a class to watch the training style used. Is the class organized? Are people and dogs having fun?

Private lessons are usually based on an hourly rate and offer one-on-one training with the trainer for the full hour. You can take as many lessons as you can afford and space them out to fit your time and budget. Sometimes trainers can work with you in your home – the environment in which your dog may be misbehaving. So, while private lessons may be more expensive, flexibility and 100% trainer focus on you and your dog are the benefits.

Board and train programs vary in length depending on the trainer's program. You leave your dog, usually for 2-4 weeks, and let the trainer work with your dog. For those that feel they don't have the finesse or patience to train their dog, the board and train program could be the answer. The trainer can set a good foundation from which you can continue to build a more obedient dog. The trainer usually provides transfer lesson(s) where handling skills are taught and transferred to the owner. Tip: Tour facilities you are considering. Seeing where your dog will stay helps in the decision-making process.

Also remember that nothing prevents you from combining some of the above approaches. For example, many people will take a group class after boarding and training their dog to enhance their handling skills and work on distraction training. Others will oftentimes supplement their group class training with private lessons to address a specific behavioral problem that couldn't be solved in class.

How do I pick a good trainer?

Word of mouth is a great reference—ask your veterinarian, boarding or dog daycare center. Many ABKA member pet care facilities, all of whom subscribe to the ABKA Code of Ethics, offer dog training. Visit www.abka.com, click on the "Pet Service Locator" and search for resources by city and state.

Plan to interview 2-3 candidates before making a selection. Ask if the trainer is a member of any national dog training associations. The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) promotes humane and positive dog training methods and, while being a member doesn't guarantee that only positive training methods are used, it could, at least with reference checks, narrow the field considerably. APDT offers "Find a Trainer" and "How to Choose a Trainer" help areas on their Web site.

While many qualities go into making a good trainer, the most important quality is the use of humane training techniques. Ask about the trainer's philosophy to determine if positive reinforcement or a reward-based method of training is used. Ask for references! And make sure you call the references. Make sure the trainer includes veterinarian references as well. A reputable trainer should not have a problem with giving you client references as well as one or two veterinarians.

A good trainer can take you from puppy to adult dog training and problem solve in between. Selecting the right trainer can enhance your dog's life and your enjoyment as a pet owner.

What is ABKA?

ABKA is the nonprofit trade association for pet care professionals. Founded in 1977 by a group of concerned individuals within the boarding kennel industry, ABKA now unites almost 3,000 individuals and businesses providing a variety of pet care services throughout the United States and around the globe. ABKA is dedicated to upgrading the pet care industry and educating the public about proper pet care. All ABKA members must affirm their commitment to quality pet care, comply with all applicable laws and ordinances, and subscribe to the ABKA Code of Ethics, which establishes standards of conduct in all aspects of their professional lives.

Your ABKA member is devoted to your pet's well being. Look for the membership certificate proudly displayed.



for Your Pets and about Your Pets



LET'S TALK ABOUT...

Training YOUR DOG



The Trade Association for Pet Care Professionals Since 1977

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