Connect with Your Canine

Why it is important to develop a good relationship with my dog?

If you are going to share your life with a dog, then you should share it well. A good relationship means effective communication, a shared enjoyment of activities and a companion who is easy to live with.

We expect our dogs to fit into our lives and are sometimes frustrated when it doesn't pan out quite the way we expected. However, with some understanding of our canine companion's perspective, a sprinkling of pack structure and a dash of education, everyone can live happily ever after.

How do I develop a good relationship with my dog?

Dogs naturally tend to live in a structured society with a leader and followers – a family. Kind leaders establish reasonable expectations and structure for their dogs. This creates a clear communication system showing your dog that you are fair and generous.

If you do not provide this structure, your dog might fill the vacancy, making decisions that are inappropriate or sometimes even aggressive. Having a plan of what you would like your dog to know and learn every day helps with family harmony.

Establish "Rules of the House":

Manage Territory: Defending a territory shouldn't be your dog's job. The yard, home, car, and your lap belong to you, not your dog.

Yard Privileges: We would like to give our dog access to the outdoors at all times. However, not all dogs should be given that privilege. If your dog routinely barks at strangers walking by the fence or below the deck, confine him to the house or a portion of your yard to eliminate this visual stimulation. Leaving your dog in the backyard allows him to practice unwanted behavior such as fence fighting, barking, wildlife harassment and other behaviors which may crop up outside the yard.

***Change Your Walk*:** Dogs can sometimes extend the territory beyond the yard. It may transfer to the regular walk or the car. With these dogs it's a good idea to drive elsewhere and walk them. Even better (and it's more interesting for everyone involved) is to explore other walks and trails to prevent a dog from defending certain locations.

***High Ground Privileges*:** Dogs perceive elevation (which a couch or bed provides) as a position of power. Because high places are very valuable to dogs, some will defend those places – growling to tell the encroachers to back off. If he shows an inclination to defend high places, avoid letting him get on your bed or couch. If you decide that the bed or couch is where you want him, require that he get off promptly on your cue and ask permission to join you.

Use an Indoor Leash: When managing your dog's behavior indoors, attach a light leash to your dog's collar and have him drag it around the house. Without having to grab the collar, you can pick up or step on the leash quickly and redirect his behavior. The length of the leash can vary with your dog's issue, size and speed.

Establish Feeding Schedule: For adult dogs feeding twice a day is a good plan. Puppies need to be fed three to four times a day depending on their size and breed. Unless there is a medical reason not to, after about 10 minutes, pick up the food bowl whether your dog is finished or not. When in training (and your dog is always in training!) use a significant portion of your dog's daily calories for training activities rather than feeding his daily calories from a dog bowl.

Chill Time: A dog sometimes needs a time-out to calm down, practice alone time, or give the guardian a break especially when he is young. Tie downs can be an excellent management tool during these times! A tie down is a 36-inch tether attached to the wall, or under a very heavy piece of furniture with a clip to attach to your dog's flat collar.

- It should be placed in a well-used area such as a kitchen or family room, and put a comfortable blanket or pillow on the floor for him to lie on.
- It's best to start out with short periods, and gradually increase them.
- He should be present in the same area as the rest of the family but unable to jump up or otherwise practice unwanted behaviors.
- Do not leave your dog unattended when on a tie down. (Please review our ***Tie Down*** handout).

Be Interactive!

***Training*:** Training sessions should have a clear goal in mind and be fun and engaging for all involved. Multiple, short (10 – 15 minute) **daily** training sessions are better than a single, long session. Your goal should be to leave your dog wanting more rather than burning him out. It's a good idea to take a class or workshop to start building an effective communication system with your dog.

Reinforce good behavior: Teach your dog what you want him to learn. Be patient and learn yourself how best to teach your dog by participating in classes or taking private lessons with a trainer. In general, reinforce behaviors you want to see appear again. Ignore or prevent behaviors you don't like.

Attention: Getting your dog's attention is your most important tool. It's difficult to train a dog who is paying attention to something else. One way to develop attention is by seeking eye contact before you give him something, like food or a treat. In addition, examine how often you pay attention to your dog, and make sure that he doesn't constantly demand attention from you by pushing, nudging, barking, or whining. (Please review our ***Attention*** handout.)

Wait*:** Dogs often love to go through doorways first and sometimes tend to lie right in thresholds. Restrict your dog's access to doorways and avoid allowing him to rush through doorways at will. Teach "Wait" to stop at doorways. You don't have to go through every doorway first but you should make sure you do not get knocked over if he rushes through the doorway. If a dog plants himself at a doorway, redirect him to move out of the way through "Find it." (Please review our ***Wait and ***Find It*** handouts.)

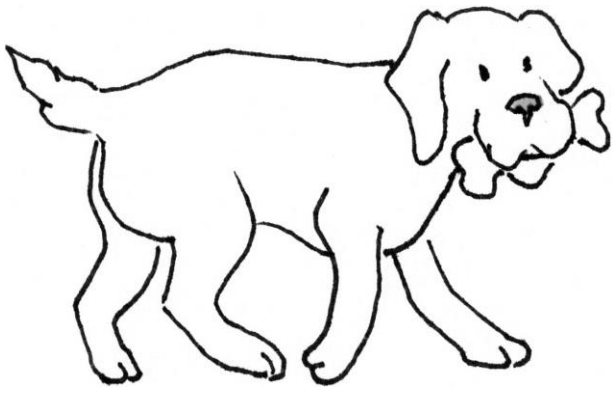
Exercise: Dogs need physical exercise. Most adults need a couple of good outings a day (½ hour +) and puppies need shorter but more frequent play periods. A tired dog gets into much less trouble than an under-stimulated one. Change your exercise sessions into shared adventures by hiking, taking a variety of city walks, playing fetch or tug, and doing obedience training. Training is important for teaching your dog expectations regarding his behavior and it is excellent mental exercise.

***Play & Toys*:** Play (with people) is an often overlooked component of a joyful human/canine relationship. Retrieving games and tug toy play are good examples of cooperative, interactive play which use toys. Other toys are useful to modify behaviors, prevent bad habits and keep your dog mentally occupied. There are three types of toys: Interactive, Enrichment and Destruction Toys.

- ***Interactive Toys***: These toys engage both you and your dog in an interactive play session which improves bonding and creates communication skills. Play with interactive toys can be used to build training motivators and are an excellent form of exercise. We strongly recommend handler/dog play over dog-to-dog play to create handler focus rather than dog focus. This type of toy is put away when the play session in complete. (Please review our ***Play: Tug Toys and Retrieving Games*** handout.)
- ***Enrichment Toys***: This toy stimulates your dog's brain by requiring the dog to "solve a problem". The built in challenge is how to get the treats out of the puzzle which taps into and stimulates your dog's natural instinct to hunt for food. These toys can be used to work with separation issues, provide structure for young dog chewing needs and help alleviate boredom. (Please review our ***Enrichment Toys*** handout.)
- ***Destruction Toys:*** These are toys to which your dog is allowed free access throughout the day. We recommend you rotate the destruction toys and allow him to chew or destroy them as necessary (and safe). Dogs are attracted to novel objects so the new toys often will engage him better than old toys lying around.

Groom regularly: Grooming allows you to look for fleas and ticks, skin abrasions, bruising, dry patches, minor cuts or wounds, lumps and bumps, and helps to keep your dog clean and beautiful. Teach your dog to cooperate in the grooming process by pairing routine handling with treats or enjoyable touch. Daily grooming sessions are essential to the care of your dog and beneficial to your relationship.

Troubleshooting:



- ***Avoid losing your temper:*** Your dog needs to trust you. A loud and scary human creates a fearful dog.
- ***Dogs have different personalities:*** Dogs come in a wide variety of personalities. Some need more structure and others need very little. Until you know how a dog will respond, it's better to manage his environment until you know more about him.
- ***Keep your goal in mind!*** With your attention and care you will help your dog be a better companion and canine citizen.

Training Resources:

Marin Humane Society's **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes. Sign up on our Behavior & Training page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumaneSociety.org.

Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by the **Marin Humane Society**, visit us at MarinHumaneSociety.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.