

Many reasons for dog training

DOG training: you are either into it, or you aren't, and lots of owners feel that once their dog has learned to be clean in the house, there isn't any need to teach it anything else.

Dog training may bring to mind groups of tweedy middle-aged women with nothing better to do with their time, but the reality is quite different.

There are lots of reasons for training dogs. A well-trained dog is less likely to get into fights, less likely to be aggressive or dominant with people, less likely to suffer boredom, fears, phobias and behavioural problems, and less likely to end up being rehomed, or worse, put down, for non-medical reasons.

Training isn't just for working dogs, and it isn't just about teaching pups to be clean, it's a useful tool to incorporate into the daily life of any dog with benefits for dog and owner alike.

Dogs naturally behave as pack animals, and whether or not they live as part of a canine pack (i.e. more than one dog in the family) they interact with their human family in the same way. The happy, well-adjusted pet is the one that knows its place

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within the family hierarchy, and knows the rules of the house. From puppydom dogs benefit from consistent messages that are reinforced with rewards for good behaviour. Early socialisation of puppies (i.e. letting them meet other dogs in safe environments) helps them to learn how to interact with other dogs and helps prevent them from getting into fights as they get older.

Young pups learn more in the first three months of age than they ever can afterwards, and it is at this stage that the basic rules of house-training, behaviour, and obedience should be put in place. Pups love learning new commands, especially if it gets them treats, and commands like "sit", "stay", and (most important when

they take off across the park) "come here" can be taught as part of play.

It is also important to bear in mind that cuddly young pups grow into big dogs with sharp teeth. Nipping should be discouraged, and pups should be familiarised with having their ears, mouths and feet handled and looked at — it'll make your vet's job much easier later on!

With a good grounding and a few minutes' practice each week throughout their lives, most dogs grow up mentally stimulated and well-adjusted and lead safer and happier lives. While training can be built on at clubs, and particular activities and sports suit some dogs, the basics can be taught and practised within the home and out on normal walks.

For those dogs that do develop problems with behaviour, aggression or stress, training can provide a helpful route towards an easier life. Specific types of training are available, and dog trainers, behaviourists and vets are well placed to advise on techniques.

Training started in puppyhood and continued throughout a dog's life tends to result in a happy, healthy dog that has a great relationship with its owner.