

# CHOOSING A DOG TRAINER

Choosing a dog trainer can be a stressful, yet very important task. There are countless methods, techniques, and styles used by dog trainers, and the methods used can influence your relationship with your dog. Here are some helpful tips to consider when searching for a dog trainer.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE INTERVIEWING

-  What is your educational background for dog training and/or behavior?
-  Do you have any areas of specialization or special certifications?
-  Do you belong to any professional associations? If not, why not?
-  What is your preferred method of training?
-  What equipment or tools do you use?
-  Do you provide a follow-up for clients?
-  Do you have references we can contact?

## THINGS TO LOOK FOR

**Reward-Based Training:** Trainers who encourage pets to work for rewards (such as treats, toys, play, or affection) are recommended over those who use techniques like fear or intimidation. Using pain or discomfort to punish unwanted behaviors can create lasting and unintended side effects. Rewards will motivate pets to continue positive behavior and provide a more positive experience overall.

**Continual Education:** While the principles of behavior remain constant, dog training techniques and methods are constantly evolving. Look for a trainer who stays in the know with the trends by attending workshops or conferences and consulting with others in the field.

**Vaccinations:** Talk to your trainer about the vaccination requirements, especially for puppy classes, and their cleaning protocols. Consult with your veterinarian on your trainer's vaccination requirements if you are unsure.

**Collaboration:** Good trainers are comfortable asking for help by collaborating with veterinarians and other professionals. As many negative behaviors can stem from physical problems, it is important that a dog trainer can recognize when another professional opinion is necessary.

**Comfort:** Are you and your dog both comfortable with the dog trainer? Observe your dog and other dogs' behavior in the presence of the dog trainer. Are tails wagging or tucked away? Is the trainer's tone of voice harsh or upbeat and positive? Don't be afraid to ask the trainer to further explain his or her techniques and always trust your gut!



## THINGS TO AVOID

**Trainers who guarantee their work:** Qualified behaviorists and trainers will always do their best for you, but cannot guarantee outcomes, because animals have minds of their own, and another's behavior can never be completely controlled.

**Trainers whose primary methods focus on fear, intimidation, or punishment:** If their recommendations involve choking, hitting or slapping your pet, confinement or isolation, this indicates little or no understanding of animal behavior.

**Trainers who misrepresent their qualifications:** People who call themselves animal behaviorists, even though they're not academically trained in animal behavior.

**Trainers who want to train your pet for you:** Most behavior problems are a result of interactions between the animal, the owner and the environment. Giving your pet to someone else to "fix" the problem is rarely successful because these three elements aren't addressed. Owners need to work with the animal in the home environment.

Adapted from material originally developed by The Association of Professional Dog Trainers, American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, and the applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.

