


Training 101

Choosing the best method for you and your pup By Taylor Ham



Summer is upon us, and, if you're like most Northern Virginia dog owners, summertime means hours of fun in the sun with your pup—but are you and your dog ready for it? If you watch longingly as other dog owners stroll calmly through the crowd at the farmers market or enjoy a quiet cup of coffee at an outdoor café with their canine, you may have some work to do. Whether you dream about your dog being your constant companion or simply not terrorizing your guests at the backyard barbecue, this is the season to consider professional training.

Where to Start

The vast array of dog training books and videos on the market today can be overwhelming. Trainers also abound, their websites promising fail-proof methods and sometimes seemingly conflicting advice. So, how do you sort through it all? We polled 10 Northern Virginia dog trainers for their expert advice.

Hilary Bolea, certified professional dog trainer and founder of Old Town Dog Behavior, suggests starting with yourself. “Before you hire a dog trainer, understand what kind of owner

you are, and then find out if the trainer's approach matches what you want," she says. She encourages owners to first consider what they are looking for from their dogs—do you want instant obedience, a happy, well-balanced companion, or is there a specific behavior problem you want to change? Some dog owners prefer a formal school of training, such as AKC obedience or Schutzhund personal protection training. These owners want a trainer to teach strict adherence to traditional commands and skills. Other dog owners, Bolea says, are looking for what she calls a "livable dog." These owners want to train their dogs not to pull on the leash, but don't mind whether the dog walks to the left, right, or even in front of them. Clearly defining your goals will help you decide what method of training will be the best fit.

Perhaps the best way for *NOVADog* readers to approach dog training is to investigate training and obedience programs and instructors, then decide whose dog-training philosophies coincide most closely with their own.

A Method to the Madness

Most dog training techniques used today are based on the concept of operant conditioning, first described by psychologist B.F. Skinner in the 1950s. Operant conditioning is the process by which a dog learns to associate a behavior

with consequences of that behavior. Behaviors are modified and strengthened through positive or negative reinforcement. The most prevalent training methods—traditional, positive, and balanced—apply this theory in slightly different ways.

Traditional. The methods of traditional dog training focus on the use of negative reinforcement, or removal of a negative consequence, to strengthen a behavior. For instance, if you tell your dog to sit and he stays standing, you might push down on his hindquarters to create an unpleasant sensation. If the pressure is released when the dog sits down, he will be more likely to do the same in the future. Rewards for a completed task include praise or a treat. Slip collars, prong collars, and e-collars are common tools in traditional training, which some view as overly harsh. Advocates of traditional training argue that it can provide very reliable results when done correctly and with care. As with any of the methods of training described in this article, if something doesn't feel quite right about how your dog is responding, don't be afraid to speak up.

Nick White, owner of Off-Leash K9 Training in Woodbridge, has trained dogs for the Marine Corps and Secret Service and now uses a combination of e-collar and marker-based training to guarantee his clients instant,

off-leash obedience. "What we enjoy most is seeing dogs that have spent their whole life on a leash, now being 100 percent off-leash and obedient," he says.

Jenn Guerriero, owner of Big City Dogs in Washington, DC, specializes in training dogs for the urban environment using city living common sense. "I take on a lot of difficult cases and have been around quite a bit of unstable dogs. With the right structure and an owner willing to put in the work, we can make progress on these dogs," she says.

One of her most difficult cases involved a female owner with two very unstable Pit Bull mixes. "These dogs couldn't be within a two block radius of other dogs without reacting, and, when they did, they would displace and turn on each other," says Guerriero.

The owner had tried everything: head halters, prong collars, treats in the pocket, walking them separately. Nothing could give her the control she needed. Guerriero and her client decided to try a mixture of e-collar training and a rigid obedience plan.

"Both dogs were conditioned to the collar, placed on a rigid obedience plan, and by the end of week two, were riding elevators and walking past other dogs on the sidewalk," says Guerriero. "We continued working together until our final lesson, where we were able to take both dogs to an off-leash area and allow

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these dogs to actually play with other dogs and recall on command. My client was speechless and broke down in tears," says Guerriero.

Positive. The main goal of a positive reinforcement trainer is to use what the dog finds rewarding as motivation for learning.

Positive reinforcement is a science-based operant learning principle, and advocates of this method believe it is effective at teaching reliable behaviors and helping to build a relationship built on trust rather than punishment and coercion.

For example, if you give your dog a treat when he lies down, he will start to lie down more frequently in order to get the reward. This type of training is often enhanced with the use of a clicker to "mark" desirable behaviors. Clicker training is a popular method of positive training, in which the sound of the clicker creates an association between a desired behavior and a positive consequence, like a treat. The absence of any form of negative reinforcement, punishment, or controversial training device makes positive training a very friendly and safe method of training that is easy for most owners to learn and use.

The trainers at KissAble Canines, LLC choose not to use slip chains or e-collars, and say they have had great success using positive methods. "Not only do we treat our clients'

Meet Our Scholarship Winner

This Spring, *NOVADog Magazine* invited readers to apply for a \$300 training scholarship, to be awarded based on an essay application. We received so many applications that it took longer than expected to come up with a winner," says Janelle Welch, publisher of *NOVADog Magazine*. "There were so many deserving doggies that we had to narrow it down to our top 10 and choose by lottery," she says.

The winner? Meet Willow, a three-year-old Cockapoo, and her owner Hannah Bergland of Alexandria.

"Hi, my name is Willow, and I get lots of compliments from people about my calm temperament; friendly, caring personality; and on how I would be an amazing therapy dog! My mom works with troubled children and their families. I've seen these kids from afar and, boy oh boy, they look so sad. If I could just curl up in their laps for a few minutes, I just know it would brighten their day and turn their frowns upside down.



"I also want volunteer my smile to visit with people she used to work with in the inner city who can't have pets because they have serious mental illnesses that make it hard for them even to take care of themselves. She says my stubby little tail will bring those people lots of joy. But to do this I need your help.

"Mom has done research on how helpful someone like me can be in the lives of these people, but I need to be trained as a Canine Good Citizen and pass a test with a therapy dog organization before mom and her boss will let me help these folks. I've had a little bit of training, but if I'm being honest, I could use a little bit more work on my manners, obedience, and maybe some special help in working as a therapy dog. Mom has been great at giving me all the love in the world, she just needs a little extra training to smooth out some of my rough edges. My vocabulary is excellent, if I do say so myself. I'm affectionate and loving, but I don't go overboard like Scooby Doo... Well, I do like giving mom kisses when she gets home from work!"

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dogs with positive-based methods, we treat our clients the same way," says Lisa Tudor, owner of KissAble Canines. One of Lisa's clients was a woman who was wheelchair bound and had a young herding breed with lots of energy to burn. "We worked on having her walk the dog while in the chair, and, in a few lessons, I was teary-eyed from seeing the woman taking her dog for a walk while the dog walked beautifully next to her," says Tudor. "Those are the moments I love to train for."

Positive training can be used not only to teach basic obedience commands but also to solve common household behavioral problems. Anne Davis, founder of Rudy's Friends Dog Training, Inc., tries to be creative and think outside the box when using positive training to solve behavioral problems. "Recently," she says, "I used the 'find it' game to help a very fearful dog feel more comfortable with me. The dog was so busy finding chicken hotdogs that very

soon she was taking them from my hand."

Teresa Hogge, founder and president of Belly Rubs Pet Care, in Ashburn, uses her experience as both a trainer and a groomer to help pet parents build that special bond between themselves and their furry family members. "Our training approach is geared towards being fun for you and your dog. Our biggest goal is to teach you how to communicate more effectively with your dog," says Hogge.

Michele Fisher, owner of Always There Pet Care in Falls Church, learned from one of her training experiences that the solution is not always going to be black and white. Her toughest training challenge was an owner who had a physical disability, preventing the use of her arms to direct the dog in training exercises. Michele adapted her training methods to incorporate her feet instead of her hands and arms. "I worked with the little dog for four weeks, and he learned the foot commands very fast. Every

Dog Trainer Credentials

There are many ways that one can become a professional dog trainer. Some trainers have apprenticed for a period of time with an experienced trainer before branching out on their own. Some have special schooling, such as higher degrees from colleges and universities in animal behavior. Others came into the profession through working in animal shelters or competing in dog sports and competition. It is not unusual to come to the profession through a combination of experiences both experiential and educational.

However, like many other professions, there are different levels of education and training needed to obtain the credentials listed after a dog trainer's name.

Certificate Programs are educational programs awarded by an educational program or institution designed to teach a certain set of skills or knowledge. Upon graduating from the program, trainers receive a certificate. Examples of certificate programs include the Karen Pryor Academy, Animal Behavior College, San Francisco SPCA, and more. The main focus of a certificate program is education and the educational process begins and ends with the program—from enrollment through graduation.

A Certification has a different focus of assessing skills and/or knowledge, and are awarded by a third-party, standard-setting organization. A certification is designed to show that the recipient has met a set of standard skills/knowledge in their profession. In order to maintain a certification, further education from independent organizations is required, usually in the form of continuing education units (CEUs). Examples of certifications are the CPDT-KA (Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers) and the CDBC (International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants).

Here are some popular certifications and the corresponding approving organization:

CPDT-KA: Certified Professional Dog Trainer - Knowledge Assessed through Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers

ACAAB: Associate Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist by The Animal Behavior Society

CAAB: Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist by The Animal Behavior Society

CABC: Certified Animal Behavior Consultant through the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants

CDBC: Certified Dog Behavior Consultant through the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants

CCAB: Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourist through the International Association for the Study of Animal Behavior

DACVB: Diplomate American College of Veterinary Behaviorists

Here are some popular certificate programs and the corresponding schools:

ABC: Certified Dog Trainer through Animal Behavior College

AHT: Animal Health Technology (Associate of Science) through San Diego Mesa College

IACP: Certified Dog Trainer through the International Association of Canine Professionals

Cert.PDTST: Professional Dog Training Science and Technology Certificate from the Companion Animal Sciences Institute

CTC: Certificate in Training and Counseling through San Francisco SPCA Dog Training Academy

CTP: Certified Training Program through the Karen Pryor Academy for Animal Behavior and Training

Source: Association of Pet Dog Trainers

dog, client, or situation is different, and there are going to be many grey areas," says Fisher.

Hilary Bolea used positive training methods to successfully house train Lucy, a 3-year-old blind border collie rescued from a puppy mill. Lucy had neurological problems that caused her to blink and stagger uncontrollably, and whenever she smelled food she became ferociously aggressive, biting anything around her. "I knew that in order to train her to go to the bathroom outside we would have to be able to give her treats, but she had bitten my hand the first time I tried, thinking I was a competitor for the treat," says Bolea. So she devised a method where her owner would drop a treat onto a china dish, and tap the dish with a shoe. As soon as Lucy started walking toward the dish, the owner walked away. That way, Lucy got her treat, and no one got bitten. "By the end of our sessions, Lucy was fully house trained, bonding with her family, and enjoying the life she deserved," Bolea says.

Balanced. The balanced trainer uses a combination of positive and negative reinforcement and appropriate corrections when needed. Followers of this school of thought may use clickers, slip or correctional collars, or a combination of techniques, and often adapt their methods to suit the needs of their clients.

"I try not to go into a new situation with a predetermined set of ideas and strategies," says Keri Putonen, owner and trainer at Unleashed Abilities. "Every dog is different, as is every owner and every environment," she says.

Sandy and Carlos Mejias at Old Town School for Dogs also work with a balanced approach. They say that the secret to success is working with repetition to teach each exercise, using praise or correction when necessary.

Even though opinions and techniques vary from trainer to trainer, practitioners of all three methods do agree on one thing: dog training must be consistent, and family members should use the same prompts, responses, and methods when training to avoid confusing the dog.

At Home or Away

If you want to teach your dog basic commands like "lie down," "come," and "stay," a class setting may work well for you. On the other hand, if your problem is specific to your home or neighborhood—your dog is jumping on visitors at the door or showing aggression to dogs on your street—you may find that working with a trainer in your home is more effective.

Arlington-based company Fur-Get Me Not recently expanded into the space next door to open a larger training facility. The big, bright

SUMMER READING

We asked Northern Virginia trainers what should be on every dog owner's summer reading list. Visit the NOVADog Blog online for a list of books recommended by our experts.
www.novadogmagazine.com/summerbooks

new space offers a series of "specialty" classes that are unique to the area, including building confidence in fearful dogs, working with bully breeds and reactive dogs, outdoor city walks, and one night workshops that focus on specific behaviors like leash manners, recalls, and polite greetings, all using positive reinforcement. And if your dog is a star pupil, Fur-Get Me Not's flexible level-based training program lets you progress at your own pace.

"Whichever method and setting you choose," says Tammy Rosen, owner of Fur-Get Me Not, "ask yourself whether your dog is happy, safe, and learning effectively—you are your dog's greatest advocate." **ND**

Taylor Ham is a freelance writer from Ithaca, NY. She currently lives in Alexandria with her husband Stephen and two dogs, Samson and TJ.

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— Angela (Accokeek, MD)



TRAINING 101: Guide to Dog Trainers

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 <p>Always There Pet Care, LLC Owner: Michele Fisher 703.932.8136 130 West Jefferson St. Falls Church, VA 22046 atpc01@aol.com www.alwaystherepetcare.com</p>	Positive Reinforcement	Serving all of Northern VA	Certified Dog Trainer through Animal Behavior College				9 Years
 <p>Belly Rubs Owner: Teresa Hogge 571.295.5516 bark@bellyrubspetcare.com www.bellyrubspetcare.com</p>	Positive Reinforcement	Fairfax & Loudoun Counties	CPDT Certified Professional Dog Trainer*				4 Years
 <p>Big City Dogs Owner: Jenn Guerriero 917.628.8015 jenn@bigcitydogs.net www.bigcitydogs.net</p>	Balanced Training Methods	Northern VA, DC Metro Area	Certified Canine Behavior and Training Specialist through Triple Crown Academy International School for Dog Trainers				8 Years
 <p>Fur-Get Me Not Dog Training School Owner: Tammy Rosen 703.933.1935 4140 S Four Mile Run Dr. Arlington, VA 22206 tammy@furgetmenot.com www.furgetmenot.com</p>	Positive Reinforcement	Arlington Alexandria Annandale Fairfax Falls Church McLean Washington DC	CPDT-KA Certified Professional Dog Trainer Knowledge Assessed				10 Years
 <p>Kissable Canine, LLC Owner: Lisa Tudor 703.574.3383 trainer@kissablecanine.com www.kissablecanine.com</p>	Positive Reinforcement	Arlington Alexandria Fairfax Reston Ashburn McLean Great Falls	CPDT-KA Certified Professional Dog Trainer Knowledge Assessed				5 Years

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 <p>Off-Leash K9 Training Owner: Nick White 888.413.0896 2627 Hanco Center Drive Woodbridge, VA 22191 info@offleashk9training.com www.offleashk9training.com</p>	Balanced Training Methods	DC Virginia Maryland	Trained dogs for US Marine Corps, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, US Secret Service Academy				9 Years
 <p>Old Town Dog Behavior Owner: Hilary Bolea 202.725.5598 hilary@oldtowndogs.com www.oldtowndogs.com</p>	Positive Reinforcement	DC, Maryland and Virginia within one hour of the Beltway in any direction	CPDT-KA Certified Professional Dog Trainer Knowledge Assessed				5 Years
 <p>Old Town School for Dogs Owners: Sandy & Carlos Mejias 703.836.7643 529 Oronoco St. Alexandria, VA 22314 otsfd@hotmail.com www.otsfd.com</p>	Balanced Training Methods	Northern VA, DC Metro Area	Trained over 35,000 dogs, serving the DC Metro area for 36 years				42 Years
 <p>Rudy's Friends Dog Training, Inc. Owner: Anne Davis 703.395.9450 rudysfriends@cox.net www.rudysfriendsdogtraining.com</p>	Positive Reinforcement	Northern Virginia	CDT Certified Dog Trainer by the International Association of Canine Professionals				11 Years
 <p>Unleashed Abilities Owner: Keri Putonen 703.371.9800 keri.putonen@unleashedabilities.com www.unleashedabilities.com</p>	Balanced Training Methods	Northern VA, DC Metro Area	CPDT-KA Certified Professional Dog Trainer Knowledge Assessed				8 Years

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