

How to Find a Good Trainer

By Sherry Woodard

A dog trainer can help you discourage unwanted behavior in your pet and encourage desirable behavior. They teach the basics: house-training, crate training, and correcting behaviors like digging, barking, chewing, jumping up on people and pulling on lead. Trainers generally don't have medical knowledge or enough expertise to deal with serious behavior problems, but they are the least expensive option among the behavior professionals.

The trainers at Best Friends have found that dog training built on a positive relationship is the kindest – and also the most effective – method of training. Positive training methods have lasting beneficial effects. When you have a positive relationship with the dog, you have the animal's trust, and he/she wants to spend time with you and work with you. Training based on punishment or dominance negates any sort of positive relationship you might develop with the animal. For more details, see "Why We Use Relationship-Based Training."



Anyone can claim to be a trainer, so ask questions like the following if you're thinking about hiring someone:

How were you trained?

Look for someone who has had life experience, someone who has been around animals, not just taken classes. Ask about formal training, but keep in mind that many good trainers are self-taught through experience. Also, the best trainers keep themselves well-informed about new training methods and theories.

What training methods do you use?

You want to find a trainer who uses humane training methods – someone who will give you and your pet a positive experience. You don't want a trainer who uses punishment or compulsion training (in which the dog is compelled to perform a behavior and physically corrected for noncompliance).

How much experience do you have?

The trainer should have at least six months of experience. Anything less and the person may not know how to work with problem behavior in a calm, confident manner. Animals can sense a lack of confidence, and the training will be less successful as a result.

What types of animals have you trained?

Some trainers work with a variety of animals and some only work with one type. It's most desirable for the trainer to have had experience working with a wide variety of animals, since you learn something different from training each type of animal.

Are you certified by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers?

This is the only national certification for pet dog trainers.

Can I contact a few of your customers?

Often the most helpful information comes from those who have used the services of the trainer you are interested in.

While you're talking to the trainer, take note of whether the trainer is patient and clear when explaining the training process and answering your questions. After all, your dog isn't the only one who will be in training. You will be, too, and you'll need to have good communication with the trainer.

We recommend that you visit during one of the trainer's sessions to see the style, techniques and tools being used. If the trainer does anything that you are uncomfortable with, keep looking.

You can find a certified dog trainer through www.ccpdt.org, the website for the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers. You can also find a trainer through the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (www.apdt.com); choose a trainer who is a professional member of APDT. If there are no trainers in your area, contact one of the trainers listed and ask him/her to recommend someone. If you are told by a trainer that he or she is not qualified for your case, ask for a referral to a behavior counselor or animal behaviorist.

Sherry Woodard is the animal behavior and training consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets mission.

See also: [Why We Use Relationship-Based Training](#)