



CHOOSING A TRAINER

You may ask, if you are getting information from the vet, why would I need to go to a trainer? A trainer can help you with the problems that you are having specifically for your dog. The environment of a class can help you with a problem down the road that you will have either with the current dog or with a future one. Finally, socialization (3-12 weeks of age) cannot be done in a bubble. Making sure that your dog is comfortable with new surroundings can be challenging. A class setting can help with specific questions and help with the socialization process.

DANGER: THERE ARE NO REGULATIONS ON DOG TRAINERS. This means that anyone can call themselves a dog trainer. They don't need to know anything about training. They don't need to know anything about dogs. You will be the advocate for your dog! So here are some helpful hints for finding a trainer:

- **Reward-Based Training**
 - Using scientific and humane methods to modify behavior.
 - Positive reinforcement, clicker training, marker training, force free are all good terms to look for.
- **Good Teacher/Communicator**
 - A good dog trainer teaches the human how to work with the dog. If you can't understand the trainer, their instruction isn't going to be helpful.
- **Continued Education**
 - The science of dog training is always changing. Is the trainer keeping up?
- **Required Vaccinations**
 - The physical health of your dog is also very important. Does the training facility recognize that?
- **NO Guarantees**
 - Guarantees are for those that only care about the results, not the method! **Making sure that positive reinforcement techniques are used is the highest priority.**
- **Trainers That Know Their Own Limits**
 - It is important to be able to solve some behavioral issues, but know when to refer to a veterinarian if medication is needed or an other trainer if more experience in a specific area is required.
- **Teamwork**
 - The trainer should be able to work with a veterinarian, with you as the owner/handler, and with other trainers as needed to solve any training issue.
- **Your comfort is Important**
 - If trainer does something that makes you uncomfortable, LEAVE!
- **Dogs and people Having a Good Time**
 - Training is fun for both the people and the dogs. If the dogs look unhappy, this could be an indication of a training facility that you want to avoid.
- **Equipment**
 - Harnesses, gentle leaders, clickers, mats, and crates are all equipment that is associated with positive reinforcement training.
- **Class Size**
 - Large classes are good if you need to work with your dog in a distracting environment on behaviors that your dog is already familiar with. Smaller classes give better one on one attention.



The following are some Red Flags that you should avoid:

- **Equipment**
 - Shock collars, electric collars (or e-collars), inch collars, and prong collars are all equipment that is not compatible with positive reinforcement.
- **"Board and Train"**
 - Places that board and train dogs, then give them back to your rarely work. Owners need training too! Also, who knows how they are treating your dog when you're not there.
- **Not Letting You Watch**
 - Places that don't let you watch probably don't want you to see how they train the dogs.
- **Listen to the Language**
 - Talking about wolves and hierarchy, submission and dominance, or alpha behavior is a red flag.
- **Certain Techniques**
 - Forcing the dog, causing pain or fear, or making you uncomfortable is a problem.
- **Not Using Food or Toys**
 - If food is a "bribe" or "praise is all you ever need" this is not a positive reinforcement training scheme.
- **Bragging About the Number of Times they've Been Bitten**
 - This simply indicates that they don't read dog body language well and you should find a trainer that does.

So, what is a board-certified veterinary behaviorist and at what point should you seek them out? A veterinary behaviorist is a veterinarian that has gone back and done an internship of one year working in a veterinary practice. They then do a 2-3-year residency where they specifically study and work on behavior of multiple species. There is then a board certification exam that they must pass. Any veterinarian that calls themselves a behaviorist should have board certification. Be warned that non-veterinarians can call themselves behaviorists, and it doesn't mean anything! After passing their veterinary degree, DVM or VMD is added after their name. After passing the board exam, DACVB is listed after their name and veterinary title.

Why see a veterinary behaviorist instead of a regular trainer in combination with a general practicing veterinarian? The following is a list of things that should really be dealt with by a specialist:

- **Aggression**
 - The aggression is directed at the owners/handlers.
 - There is bite history where the animal has bitten multiple people in multiple circumstances.
 - When even a one-time bite is severe.
- **Separation Anxiety**
 - The dog is self-mutilating to a high degree.
 - When medication from a veterinarian and guided training from a trainer didn't work.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**
 - ANY compulsive disorder should be seen by a board-certified veterinary behaviorist after a full workup by your regular veterinarian.
- **When Medication from a Veterinarian and Guided Training from a Trainer Did Not Work.**

This is a lot more complicated than it seems! But choosing a trainer carefully will, in the long run, be more beneficial to you and your dog than picking one at random.