

## DOG TRAINING WITH CHILDREN

Do you have a budding dog trainer in your family? A small person? A lively person? A small, lively person who loves to interact with your dog but needs some guidance on how to be most effective?

Children can be very good trainers in their own right, but first you both need to learn some basics. From the dog's perspective, most children are seen as equals. Your dog may adore your children and love to play with them and even keep them out of mischief, but the dog usually treats the child as another puppy. The child is, after all, your human puppy. In order to make the transition from human puppy to Human In Charge, the dog needs you, the owner and primary trainer to make that happen.

Let me say that dog training class, at least at the beginning and intermediate levels, is not the place for your child to learn how to train your dog. We at Deep Peninsula Dog Training Club have a rule that nobody under 16 years of age may train the dog except in special circumstances. First of all, children under this age have spent their entire lives following instructions and directions from adults (and older siblings), and the transition from Follower to Leader is not yet firmly in place. They simply have not enough experience and maturity to be the One In Charge, and the dog senses this. It is not until the dog understands just who is in charge that he can be effectively trained to respect and focus on the trainer.

Secondly, our classes run an hour in length, and many children under 16 years of age simply do not have the staying power to complete the class with sustained attention and focus. Their attention is splintered and split between the dog, the person conducting the class, their parents, and all outside influences. Most of the younger kids I've allowed to train are easily distracted, often abandon the class exercises, and turn to other less taxing ways of amusing themselves, like skipping across the dog training area or running to Mom.

Thirdly, just as in a dance class, most of the instructor's directions to the class are visual as well as verbal – a step-by-step explanation of how to teach your dog a skill. I may certainly show how to teach a skill with my own dog as a demonstration dog or with your dog if it's OK with you, but following the length and type of instructions I give may be difficult for a child to do in a group setting. It's just too many directions in a sequence to remember and copy. The class is taught at an adult level, after all, and we cover many training skills over a relatively short period of time. It would be better if the child learns the step-by-step methods and "dance steps" individually on a one-on-one basis.

This one-on-one instruction is, however, exactly what I want YOU to do with your child in a non-distractible environment. You will learn in class how to train your dog using the techniques and methods I show you. Then you will pass on this information to your child and at the same time, be right there to back up your commands to your dog with your authority and knowledge. In other words, you will pass on the power to your child and your dog will learn to accept the child as the One In Charge.

How do you do this? Easy. Let's take the example of your dog's most basic command: the Sit. I show you in class how to put the Sit on command first by teaching your dog to Sit using a cookie as a guide then later as a reward. After this, we practice having your dog respond to the signal and command for Sit, and when he demonstrates that he can Sit with gesture and verbal cues only, you can take the Sit command on the road. The road to home.

Now you pass on the command to your child. Without the dog present, show your child the signal for sit (a sweeping gesture with your left hand from your thigh up to waist level) and tell her the verbal

command ("Sit.") Have her practice the two together several times without the dog to cement the "dance steps." Now, go get your dog. Stand behind your child, dog in front of you, and show your dog that you have a cookie in your hand. Give the child the cookie by placing it in her left hand. By now, your dog is probably focused on the cookie. Still standing behind the child, ask her to give the signal AND command for Sit. If the dog sits, GREAT! Have a party. He did it!

Most likely the dog will just stand there waiting for the cookie, not recognizing that he needs to follow the human puppy's command. When this happens, begin again, but this time take your child's left hand in your left hand and sweep her hand into the Sit signal while she says, "Sit." The dog will most likely sit, recognizing you as the Authority here. After all, you are standing behind your child, looming over her well within the sphere of your dog's influence. Repeat this three or four times, with the child rewarding the dog from her left hand each time he sits. On the fourth or fifth repetition, let go of the child's hand and have her give the signal and command all by herself. Remind her to say the Sit command only once. And watch your dog comply. Have another party!

Congratulations! You have just passed off your Authority to your child! Because dogs do not generalize well, your dog may not be able to follow your child's Sit command in another place in your yard or to comply with a completely different command, like Down. Follow the same sequence outlined above with each new exercise you are passing off, and begin each lesson by reviewing with both child and dog one or two of the commands that your dog has learned in the hours and days before. If you run into trouble, go back to the basic Sit exercise to remind your dog that now it is your child who is In Charge.

Repeat these skill sequences with each child in the family, and your spouse, too. We want your dog to respect the authority of all family members and to know that if he doesn't comply for any reason, you are there to step in and make him correct. You are there to remind the dog that all family members are above him in the family Who's In Charge hierarchy and that he needs to follow their commands in order to be rewarded. Pretty soon, his compliance will become automatic.

The bottom line is this: the key to all dog training begins with the dog recognizing that you, not he, is In Charge. If you have a dog that finds this a difficult concept, jump to the Nothing In Life Is Free chapter in the New Beginnings handbook and put that program into practice before anything else. You will find your life with Dog is easier than ever before and that training both your dog and your children (with your dog) will become less frustrating and more rewarding.