Canine Companions



A dog is a friend for life!

Sharon Parsons

Nelson Literacy Directions

CANINE Companions

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Dear Reader

As the ultimate companion animal, dogs have won the hearts of millions of people. Listen to an avid dog lover and you may hear reasons for ownership like: "I can buy any kind of collar for my pooch and he never asks, 'Is that the latest brand?'"; or "I can take my dogs for walks around the block, and they never say, 'Not this street again!'" and "If I come home tired, I instantly feel better when I see my puppy wagging its tail."

> "I LOVE MY FAMILY. THEY ALWAYS KNOW WHEN I'M HUNGRY, WHEN I NEED A WALK AND WHEN I NEED A CUDDLE!"
>
> AN AVID LOVER OF PEOPLE

I hope you enjoy reading about many clever dogs in this book: a team of mushing surveillance dogs in Greenland, the Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dogs, working border collies on farms, and Joey, a star agility sports dog who was adopted by Kelly.

P.S. My two dogs are treasures. Above is an image of me holding Soots and Bibi back from tearing off down the street!

Sharon Parsons

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1 Are Dogs Our Friends?



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Dogs have long been revered in many cultures around the world as the ultimate animal companions for their loyalty, intelligence and adaptability as domestic pets, and also as workers. There are numerous breeds and crossbreeds in the canine world that enable people to choose which dog best suits their needs and their environment. Dogs instinctively operate as pack animals, so we have had to adapt to their natural instincts when living with them or training them for specific purposes.

Wild Canines

Not Socialised



Wolves

Wolves and dogs are closely related and their behaviours are very similar. The main difference is that for tens of thousands of years, humans have selectively bred dogs to shape their characteristics into ones that humans can live with. By selecting and breeding from generations of calmer, less aggressive dogs, humans have modified breeds that are less temperamental and easier to control. Domestic dogs are willing to accept humans as part of their pack, whereas wild dogs and wolves are not.

Can Be Domesticated



Dogs

Can Be Socialised



Dingos

Some wild dogs, such as dingos, can become socialised (but never domesticated) if they are taken into a human environment before the age of eight weeks.

CAUTION: While it has taken thousands of years to shape modern domestic dogs' characteristics, it can take only a matter of months for a dog to revert to its wilder instincts. Stray or abandoned dogs often form packs to hunt and can become very aggressive.

The Psychology of Pack Behaviour



Packs in the Wild

In the wild, dogs learn to cooperate with other members of their pack from an early age. They also learn to submit to the will of the pack leader, or "alpha" dog. If they don't, they become outcasts and have little chance of survival on their own.

Packs in the Home

This characteristic makes dogs ideal for training by humans. When dogs are brought up in a domestic environment, they assume that the humans are their pack. They also identify one of the humans as the alpha dog, and will obey his or her commands. Dogs can become confused when they get commands from too many people.

Pack Territory

While pack behaviour may be useful in many situations, it can also become dangerous if people do not understand how a dog thinks. When a stranger comes to the house, for example, a dog will immediately realise the person is not a member of its pack, and it may become defensive. It will look to see if the alpha dog (its owner) accepts that person. That's because a dog regards its surroundings as its pack territory, and may become aggressive if someone from outside their pack crosses into their space.

Bark Warnings

The dog's idea of territory can also cause it to bark. Barking can serve to "call" the other members of the pack back to their territory, which is why a dog left alone may often bark constantly. Barking can also warn other non-pack-member dogs to keep away, which is why a dog may bark when it hears another dog, even if it's just walking by.

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Caution for Children

In the wild, pack behaviour is based on a hierarchy. Dogs that are more aggressive and dominant are higher up in the hierarchy. The alpha dog is always at the top – but the lower-ranked dogs may fight to exert dominance over each other. This may cause problems when a dog encounters a child who is not a member of their pack. A dog's natural instinct is to try and dominate what it sees as a lower-ranked dog.



Understand and Care

Once you understand how dog psychology works, it's easy to see that extreme care should be taken around all dogs, regardless of their size, until they have clearly accepted you as part of their pack. Even then, it is important to understand that a dog will only ever see you as another dog, so don't expect it to behave like a human.

2 A Boarding School for Dogs

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All domesticated dogs require training, preferably when they are young, to teach them how to live harmoniously with people. Otherwise, some dogs can develop behavioural problems. However, not everyone has the time or skills required to do this. Dog owners who require extensive help can send their pets to a dog-training facility. At the Boarding School for Dogs in Victoria, Australia, dogs receive training for a range of issues, including antisocial behaviour such as aggression or anxiety. This allows handlers to work consistently on dogs' behavioural problems.



Dog handlers work with the dogs in the same area to assist in their distraction training.



Baring teeth is a serious example of aggressive behaviour.

Aggressive Dogs

There are all kinds of behavioural problems that dog trainers are asked to correct, but the most common one is the aggression that dogs can show towards people and other animals. Usually, aggression is a behaviour that dogs exhibit when they feel nervous or upset, and this is their way of protecting themselves. A dog boarding school can implement a step-by-step approach over ten or 20 days that is tailored to each dog's breed and particular needs.

First Training Stage for Dogs

Develop Trust and Routines

When a new dog attends a boarding school, the handler spends time becoming acquainted with its personality traits in order to develop a working relationship built on trust and respect. Trainers build trust with their dog students by being calm, firm and consistent with their commands, rewards and methods of dog handling. Meal times are important for developing consistent routines of behaviour. Manners are also important for developing good behaviour. For example, a dog is trained to wait before running out a gate until instructed to do so. This routine establishes the human as the pack leader.

Second Training Stage for Dogs

Test Success of Training

Once a dog is consistently able to respond to commands, the trainer introduces some challenges and distractions to test if the dog can continue to exhibit the new learned behaviour. This is done by placing the dog in distraction-filled scenarios to replicate life outside the boarding school.



distraction training among many dogs

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A beagle relaxes with its trainer.

Third Training Stage in the Home



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Training Owners

Once a dog has successfully completed its boarding school course, it is rehabilitated, which means it exhibits more relaxed and controlled behaviour around other animals and people. A rehabilitated dog then returns home, where the trainer works with the owners to reinforce the boarding school's training principles.



Value of Professional Training

Professional dog trainers offer an essential service to dog owners because they have the expertise and experience to tailor training programs for all kinds of dogs. Their training programs help to prevent, as well as correct, socially unacceptable behaviour so that dogs and people can live together in a happier, safer and more relaxed way.

Miniature Horse Helps in Distraction Training

Result: dog can calmly sit close to animals



Before arriving at the school, the golden retriever was easily distracted around other animals, so it underwent a distraction training program assisted by the school's resident miniature horse, Simon.

Result: dog can walk past animals without distraction



The golden retriever is an intelligent dog and it quickly learnt how to walk past Simon in the school's enclosed training area.

Result: dog can lay down close to animals



After a ten-day program, this golden retriever calmly lay down beside Simon.

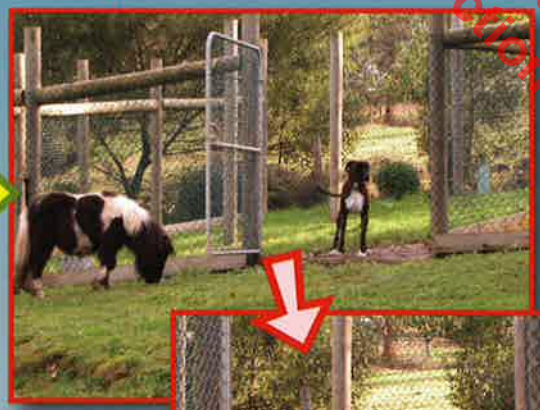


Before: Aggressive Boxer



When this boxer started the 20-day training program, it would not allow any animal to pass through the gate into its grassed area, or its territory.

The Test: Amazing Results







Finally, it was time to test the boxer. Simon passed by the boxer into its territory, and the boxer exhibited calm behaviour.

After: Calm, Trained Boxer



After the 20-day program, the boxer passed with flying colours! As for the miniature horse? He continues to help train some of the most problematic dogs at the school.



"WE ARE HAPPY WHEN DOG OWNERS GIVE THEIR PET DOGS AND FAMILIES A BETTER CHANCE OF LIVING TOGETHER IN A MORE FULFILLING WAY.

GREG FONTANA, FOUNDER OF THE BOARDING SCHOOL FOR DOGS"

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