

“Obedience” is the Foundation for all Things Dog!

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When a dog comes into our lives, it provides us with the opportunity to do so many more things than we did before.

It allows us to make new friends, to get more exercise, to have company on a quiet night alone at home, to participate in dog sports such as agility, competitive obedience, flyball, tracking, and any number of other sports, and perhaps to visit hospitals or nursing homes on a volunteer basis. All of these things will enrich our lives in some way.

However, if our dog is out of control and does not do as we ask, the quality of life with our dog will definitely not meet our expectations or needs, and the potential end result is not anything any of us want to think about.

Basic obedience is necessary for every dog. All dogs must be able to walk on a loose leash, come when called, stay put when asked to do so, and demonstrate a reasonable amount of control around the home. They should not bark when they are outside and definitely should not play fence games with the neighbour's dog.

There are essentially two types of Obedience courses offered. Those types are Companion Obedience and Competitive Obedience courses, although they are generally not mutually exclusive. Companion Obedience principles should be applied to every dog, whether or not it is taken to a class. If the current dog is one's first dog, then an Obedience class of some sort is a darned good idea and highly recommended.

Do you want to do agility with your dog? Before trying to do agility, you should make an Obedience course the first commitment on your agenda. Although agility is a huge amount of fun for both dog and handler, it is also a very stimulating activity for the dog. If your dog is not under control, your frustration level will rise, and you may give up before you have the opportunity to enjoy the sport. As in every other dog activity, in agility your dog will have to learn several behaviours, like sit, down, come or here, and many more. If you attend a basic Obedience course prior to taking an Agility course, your dog will know the basics, and you can then concentrate on agility itself.

If you have been to a dog show and have seen an Obedience trial, you may be interested in teaching your dog to heel, to retrieve, to find an object with your scent, or to respond to hand signals. You may or may not have any interest in entering an Obedience trial, and that's okay. A Competitive obedience class may be just what you need to help you teach your dog the exercises that interest you. You never know: someday you may compete if you and your dog do well. The worst that can happen is that you will have a well-trained dog with whom you can have a lot of fun and develop a closer bond. You may even have some parlour tricks that will impress your family and friends.

Wouldn't it be fun to volunteer with your dog? As our population ages, there will be more people who are unable to keep a dog in their places of residence. The health of our older population will deteriorate

as time goes on. Certified Therapy dogs are welcome in hospitals and nursing homes. Therapy dogs are people's pets, but they are required to pass a fairly stringent set of tests before being certified. These tests require that the dogs be obedient in every sense of the word. They must be good with other dogs, they must be very good with people, they must stay when asked to, they must come when they are called, they must not jump on anyone, they must not shy away from a group of people when approached, they may startle when they hear a loud or unusual noise but must recover quickly and carry on, and they cannot bark. As you can see, without appropriate obedience training, a dog cannot become a Therapy dog.

A strong foundation of obedience training, formal or otherwise, is necessary so that our dogs can be wonderful companions, both to us in life when doing "doggie things" and to others who are less fortunate than ourselves.