

Our Animal Friends

by Martha Norwalk



Continuing with my series on raising puppies to be model citizens in our human world, last month I talked about the importance of good aerobic exercise; and good, fun playtime on a consistent, daily basis. It truly does make the huge difference between having a frustrated, out-of-control, destructive juvenile delinquent puppy, or a responsive, cooperative young canine student. The other thing that can make a huge difference is basic obedience training.

With few exceptions, I recommend that most owners and their puppies go through formal basic obedience classes. Not only do you and the pup benefit from the training, but the pup also gets invaluable experience with riding in the car, going out and being under control in public places, and socializing with other people and dogs.

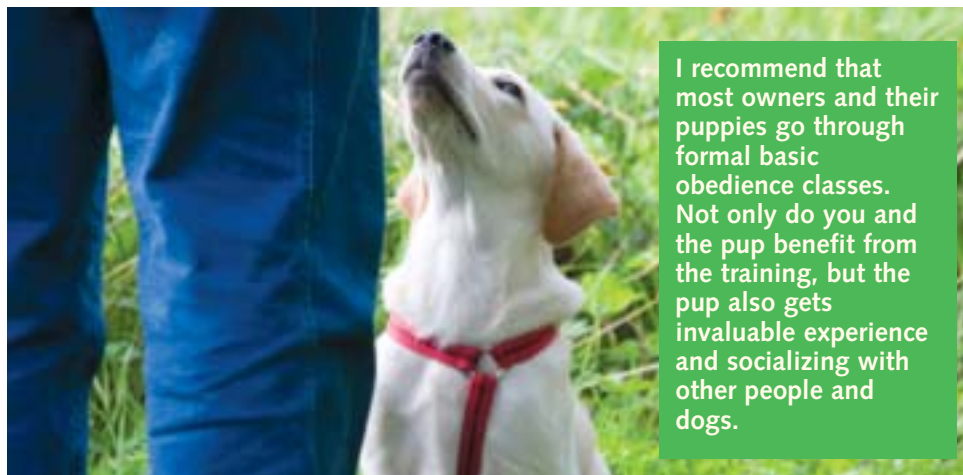
Besides all of those reasons, training classes can be great fun for both human and canine, not to mention that classes are a good motivation to be disciplined about training and that they require you to practice.

The exceptions could

include sick or injured pups, very tiny breeds (when small dog-only classes are not available), as well as very shy or extremely aggressive pups. In the later cases, it may be best to work with these puppies in a private setting until the behavior issues have been resolved and then put them in a class. In the "old" days when I taught obedience classes, dogs with special problems like fear or aggression were dealt with within the classroom setting. That is not usually the case these days. Other exceptions could be when an owner prefers to do the training on their own, with a private trainer or through a board-and-train program. And, there also could be a situation where the owner knows for sure that their dog will never need these skills during their lifetime.

These days there are tons of trainers and classes to choose from. There are large obedience organizations, both profit and non-profit, offering classes at various locations around the area. There are individual, private trainers doing classes usually through local parks depart-

ments or small businesses like smaller pet stores or doggie day care centers, and there are large pet store chains offering classes at all



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or most of their locations. Classes are usually offered on a continual basis year-round. In my opinion, quality varies a lot and depends on the talent and experience of the trainer.

There are also a number of different training philosophies or approaches to obedience training these days and you must make a choice

as to what method you feel most comfortable for you and your canine friend. You can still find "old school," very regimented, forced obedience training classes around. On the other end of the scale, there are many strictly operant conditioning or "clicker training" classes being taught. These classes tend to be based on marking appropriate behavior and positive reinforcement.

The approach that I prefer is neither of these. After more than 40 years of professional experience working with dogs, I have learned that there are no absolutes and

teach only what is right. I believe that dogs deserve more credit and are smarter than we often think. As with our human children, I think dogs need to learn what is wrong as well as what is right. It takes a balanced approach to do that.

Krysta has a "Toolbox" for entrepreneurs. I have a "toolbox" in my head for teaching and training canines. Over the years, I have put all the different methods and techniques I have learned and those that I have created from one end of the scale to the other into my toolbox. I occasionally use an updated old school method, I

last time I had to do that. But, when a dog's life is on the line, I would rather employ an old school force method than let the dog be destroyed.

You must decide which kind of trainer and which methods or techniques you are comfortable with and want to use with your dog friend. So, ask lots of questions, get referrals or references if necessary, listen to word of mouth, and you can go and observe a trainer and their classes before you decide to enroll. It is also advisable to seek help and advice about your options from me or someone like me. I often work with clients and their puppies in their home for basic manners and behavior education as well as recommending they attend obedience classes.

It is also important to note here that it is not a matter of taking one class and you're done. If you want to do it like we trainers do, you begin with a puppy kindergarten class if the pup's age and timing is right, and then you continue through a series of levels — sometimes repeating a level if needed — until you and your pup have mastered all levels.

You may also want to throw in some really fun classes like tricks and agility.

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that there is not just one method that works for all dogs and all people. I now know that what works for one dog may not work for the next and I have had to learn to become flexible in my approach and adjust according to what does work in the current situation with a particular dog and human. Therefore, I have developed and prefer a method that falls somewhere in the middle of the two above extremes.

Truly old school methods can be cruel, abusive, and unfair to our dog friends. On the other hand, strictly operant conditioning techniques

often use behavior modification techniques instead of or in addition to training techniques, and I always use some form of operant conditioning along with motivation and positive reinforcement. In addition, there are tools like, how food affects behavior, the Plechner endocrine/immune imbalance, communication techniques and the human-to-animal transference, all of which I have previously written about in this column.

I hope never to have to use a truly old school force method of training and right now I cannot remember the

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• **Wednesday, Aug. 8, 11:30-1:30: General Meeting, Networking, Speaker**

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