

Find a Great Dog Trainer

How to find the right partner for you and your puppy.

Dena Harris

Congratulations! You've brought home your furry little bundle of joy and spent more on chew toys than you ever thought possible. Now, to promote harmonious living and the long life of your shoes, its time to enroll your puppy in training.

Getting Started Where can you find a trainer? Liz Palika of Vista, California, founding member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), suggests contacting area veterinarians to ask if they know of good trainers.

Groomers, humane societies, breed clubs, neighbors, friends, relatives, recreation departments and the phone book are other sources for referrals. Also, watch for people out and about with well-behaved dogs. Stop them and ask where they trained their dogs. You can get some wonderful references that way, says Palika, who is also the author of *The K-I-S-S Guide to Raising a Puppy* (DK, 2002).

Make a few phone calls and narrow your list to at least three different names. You're going to want to do some comparison-shopping. What to Look For The problem is anyone can make up a card and say they're a dog trainer, says Shelby Marlo of Los Angeles, California, a regular guest on the Oprah Show and author of *Shelby Marlo's New Art of Dog Training* (Reed, 1999).

Although dog-training certification is available through the Certification Council for Pet Dog Trainers (CCPDT), the certification has only been available since 2001, and there are still many reputable trainers who have not undergone the process to become a Certified Pet Dog Trainer (CPDT).

This means you need to know what questions to ask and what to look for. Trainers should employ only positive reinforcement in the form of food, toys or praise. Hitting, yelling or collar jerking are never acceptable.

Some trainers recommend group classes (for socialization), some swear by one-on-one training at home, and others, such as Marlo, suggest a combination of the two. Most experts agree, however, that it doesn't make sense for a trainer to take your dog away and train it for you. You always want to be a part of the training process.

The trainer should be able to explain what training tools he or she uses and why the trainer employs the methods he or she does. Ask the trainer to explain different training methods and theories to you. Look for versatility and strong teaching skills (remember, a trainer must know how to train you, as well as your dog), and ask what experience they have with your breed.