

## Training Advice for German Shepherd Dogs

**Wean off food in dog training once your dog has learned a new command.**

### Weaning Off Food in Training

Food is used in training new behaviors, yet once the dog understands what behavior goes with a specific command, it is time to start weaning him off the food treats. At first, give a treat after each exercise. Then, start to give a treat only after every other exercise. Mix up the times when you offer a food reward and the times when you only offer praise so that the dog will never know when he is going to receive both food and praise and when he is going to receive only praise. This is called a variable ratio reward system and it proves successful because there is always the chance that the owner will produce a treat, so the dog never stops trying for that reward. No matter what, always give verbal praise.

### Obedience Classes

As previously discussed, it is a good idea to enroll in an obedience class if one is available in your area. Many areas have dog clubs that offer basic obedience training as well as preparatory classes for obedience competition. There are also local dog trainers who offer similar classes. If you intend to show your German Shepherd, inquire about handling classes with a local dog club.

At obedience trials, dogs can earn titles at various levels of competition. The beginning levels of competition include basic behaviors such as sit, down, heel, etc. The more advanced levels of competition include jumping, retrieving, scent discrimination and signal work. The advanced levels require a dog and owner to put a lot of time and effort into their training; the titles that can be earned at these levels of competition are very prestigious.

### Other Activities for Life

Whether a dog is trained in the structured environment of a class or alone with his owner at home, there are many activities that can bring fun and rewards to both owner and dog once they have mastered basic control.

Teaching the dog to help out around the home, in the yard or on the farm provides great satisfaction to both dog and owner. In addition, the dog's help makes life a little easier for his owner and raises his stature as a valued companion to his family. It helps give the dog a purpose; it helps to keep his mind occupied and provides an outlet for his energy.

Backpacking is an exciting and healthful activity that the dog can be taught without assistance from more than his owner. The exercise of walking and climbing is good for man and dog alike, and the bond that they develop together is priceless. The rule of thumb is not to let the dog carry more than onesixth of his body weight.

If you are interested in participating in organized competition with your German Shepherd, there are other activities other than obedience in which you and your dog can become involved. Agility is a popular and fun sport where dogs run through an obstacle course that includes various jumps, tunnels and other exercises to test the dog's speed and coordination. The owners run through the course beside their dogs to give commands and to guide them through the course. Although competitive, the focus is on fun— it's fun to do and fun to watch, as well as great exercise.

As a German Shepherd owner, you have the opportunity to participate in Schutzhund training if you choose. Schutzhund originated as a test to determine the best quality German Shepherds to be used for breeding stock. It is now used as a way to evaluate working ability and temperament, and some German Shepherd owners choose to train and compete with their dogs in Schutzhund trials. There are three levels of Schutzhund, Sch. I, Sch. II and Sch. III, each level being progressively more difficult to complete. Each level consists of training, obedience and protection phases. Training for Schutzhund is intense and must be practiced consistently to keep the dog keen. The experience of Schutzhund training is very rewarding for dog and owner, and the German Shepherd's tractability is well suited for this type of training.

Training Your German Shepherd Dog  
Housebreaking Your German Shepherd Dog  
Roles of Discipline in German Shepherd Dog Training  
Teach Your German Shepherd Dog Basic Commands



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