

7 Common Dog Training Mistakes (and How to Fix Them)

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Training your dog to behave and follow commands isn't always an easy task. No one is a perfect trainer, and you will certainly make some mistakes along the way. Here are seven common dog training mistakes you're probably making and how to fix them.

The Importance of Proper Dog Training

The difference between a dog and any other wild animal is all in the training. Whether you are planning on teaching your dog how to do simple tricks, how to listen and respond to commands, or skills for performance and competition, it is essential to get it right.

There is no cut-and-dry way to train. Just as humans are all unique and learn differently, so do our pets. However, there are definitive ways you *should not* train your dog if you are planning on achieving success and maintaining a good relationship while you're at it.

That being said, dog training should be a mutually exciting and beneficial project. The moment either of you aren't enjoying the process is the moment you begin setting yourselves up for failure. These are the most common dog training mistakes that you should avoid:

1. Unnecessarily Harsh Punishment

You have probably been led to believe at some point that punishing negative behavior in dogs is a positive and effective way to teach good behavior. Now, research is finding that this is likely not the case at all.

In fact, a study published in the [Journal of Veterinary Behavior](#) found that using aversive training techniques such as positive punishment and negative reinforcement can actually cause harm to the dog's physical and mental health.

There is actually no solid evidence that positive punishment is any more effective than other training methods like positive reinforcement. While at times it can be difficult for us to keep our cool when our pets keep making mistakes, it's important to avoid punishing

so harshly. This ensures that your relationship with your furry friend will stay strong during the learning process.



What to do Instead:

There are many ways to train without using punishment. One of these ways is by ignoring the incorrect action and only reacting to the behavior you are looking for. So next time you go to scold your dog for responding incorrectly to your command, try to stay calm. Wait for them to do the right thing and then respond with overwhelming love. Rather than trying to gain control over

your dog through asserting your dominance, try to earn respect from them.

2. Inconsistency

This is likely among the most critical dog training mistakes that you can make and will almost always lead to failure in your venture. Consistency is absolutely key! There are many ways that consistency plays into training, from the way you speak commands, to the behaviors you endorse, and even the timing of your sessions.

Where people mostly go wrong here is not being consistent with the behavior you allow. For example, if you are training your dog to sleep on their own bed rather than yours, but you sometimes do allow them to sleep on your bed. This confuses them and makes solidifying the behavior nearly impossible.

Another way you may go wrong when it comes to consistency is changing up your wording and commands. If you are trying to teach a dog to lay down and you go between saying lie down, lay, lay down, or go lay down, your dog will have a really hard time knowing which to respond to. Remember, your dog understands sounds and visual cues when met with positive reinforcement, they don't speak your language.

What to do Instead:



The key is here to make sure that you are not changing up your speech, allowances, and processes too much. Obviously, there will be times that something you are doing isn't working and needs to change. Just make sure that you keep these things to a minimum and you are working hard to keep your pup from getting so confused. This is one of the most critical mistakes you can make.

3. Starting Too Late

You're probably imagining that saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," but that's not exactly what I mean by starting too late. You actually *can* teach an old dog new skills and behaviors, but it takes starting from the moment that you begin your relationship with the dog.

Not everyone gets their dogs as puppies, my Husband and I didn't.

However, we were still able to train her obedience and even several tricks because we started the process from the day she became ours.

If you wait months or even years of owning your pet to begin training them, it's likely that they aren't going to take your conditioning very seriously. Imagine that you've let your dog on the couch for years, and then all of a sudden you decide you don't want them getting on the couch anymore. The first time your dog hears you say "no" when they climb up to lay next to you, they are going to have absolutely no idea what you mean.

If you wait too long to start training, your dog will already have their behaviors embedded in them and reinforcement from you in the past to back it up. Now, this doesn't mean that it is *impossible* to retrain your dog with better behavior. But it does mean that it's going to be a heck of a lot harder than it needed to be.

What to do Instead:

This is one of those mistakes that are easy to avoid. If you are planning to adopt a new puppy, or even an adult dog, start thinking about your training ahead of time. Those first few weeks are critical in establishing a relationship with them, and part of that relationship involves rules and boundaries.

When you first bring your new friend home, begin establishing these boundaries, even if it is just a rudimentary overview. Let them know when they are in an area they don't belong or acting out a behavior you don't approve of right away.

Just make sure that you are doing so lovingly and respectfully. The last thing you want is to make your dog scared of you from day one. Fear and anxiety in dogs has been shown through [scientific evidence](#) to be significantly detrimental to the success of future training and a positive relationship.

4. Being Too Repetitive

This is probably the most common dog training mistake that you—and everyone else—will make. While repetition is certainly important in the process of learning, it can also be causal to failure. Many people think that you need to engrave the action into your pet's head by constantly repeating the command until they get it right. This just simply is not the case.

Remember that dogs have incredibly short attention spans and trying to do the same thing over and over again is going to lose their attention faster than you can imagine. There is mounting evidence that repeating a command too many times with no response from your pet means they just don't have enough information.



On top of that, spending too much time on training, in general, can be more ineffective than good. Think about it this way, it's hard enough for you to pay attention to something for an hour straight, and you have a way larger capacity for attention than your pet.

For example, when you are listening to a lecture, the longer it goes on, the harder it is for you to pay attention and retain the information. It's significantly harder for your dog, especially if they aren't getting it right.

What to do Instead:

To avoid making one of the most common dog training mistakes, take this tip into consideration: If you repeat the same command 10 times in a row without any response from your pet, stop and move on to something different. When you return to the command, try approaching it in a different way. It's likely that your dog just isn't understanding what you want from them, and you need to find a better way to convey the information.

Also, try to keep your training sessions between 10 and 20 minutes at a time. You could even, perhaps, spread out several sessions throughout the day. This will keep your dog paying better attention and ensure you're both having fun.

5. Impractical Expectations and Impatience

This common dog training mistake seems pretty self-explanatory; however, it is one of the most frequently committed. It is difficult to stay patient when you are working so hard to teach good behavior to a dog. You can often find yourself thinking, "Why can't you just get it right?" or, "We've gone through this a million times!"

Whatever you do, you cannot get impatient. One of the biggest roots of this impatience is unrealistic expectations. Many people, including myself at points, have been guilty of thinking that their pet should just understand what I want a figure it out.

Sometimes it can even be a cause of having too much faith or belief in your pet, a seemingly loving sentiment. If you expect that your new dog is going to get a grasp on all your house rules in the first week, you are sorely mistaken.

What to do Instead:

It's important to take a step back and remember that Rome wasn't built in a day and your puppy probably isn't going to stop peeing on the floor in one day either. If you think that your dog is falling behind and you're beginning to get impatient, consider doing some research to see what others are experiencing. Or, even better, consider what mistakes *you* might be making.

6. Abusing Treats

While using treats to train can be very effective, there is a big difference between bribery and reinforcement. And, unfortunately, this line is often crossed even in the best of intentions.

It's clear that a dog that receives a treat after performing a behavior is more likely to repeat this behavior in the future, but treats can prove negative if used incorrectly. Rewarding your pup with too many treats can result in them losing interest in receiving the treat, or even cause them to develop unhealthy dependencies and/or weight gain.

What to do Instead:

Again, the key here is understanding the difference between treats as a reward for good behavior and treats as a bribe. This is best displayed by *when* your dog becomes aware of the treat. You don't want to wave the treat in their face and then request them to perform the action. It's likely that they won't be able to focus their attention on anything but that treat.

Instead, encourage them to perform the action or behavior, and then only after they have responded correctly - you can reward them with a tasty treat. You don't have to give them a huge treat, either. In fact, small little treats are great for inducing motivation, as well as keeping them from eating an excessive amount and potentially gaining unhealthy weight.

And remember, you can reward your dog in other ways that don't involve food and treats. Most dogs like love and attention just as much, if not more, than receiving a nice treat.

7. Reinforcing Negative Behavior

Sometimes, you will find yourself reinforcing negative behaviors in your dog without even noticing. This causes your dog to be much more likely to continue repeating negative actions without you ever knowing why. Remember that dogs seek attention from their owners, and even negative attention can reinforce negative behavior.

An example of this would be calling your dog over to you when they bark in an attempt to correct their behavior. If you call them over and then scold them after they get to you, they may be confused about which action caused the scolding. This means they think you called them over because you were happy with the barking and scolded them for coming over to you.

Remember, these are dogs, not humans. They don't speak your language, and they have a very short-term memory. Another example of accidentally reinforcing negative behavior is comforting your dog when they bark at thunder or something else that they are afraid of. This puts an idea in their head that if they bark in fear, they will receive attention from you.

What to do Instead:

While your first instinct when your pet does something undesirable like bark at you or beg for attention and/or food is to respond negatively, this may accidentally reinforce the behavior. Try to, instead, ignore the behavior until your pet realizes that nothing is going to come from it.

Also, don't call your dog to you if you are going to punish them. This will confuse them beyond belief. Rather, come to them while they are doing the action, or where the action occurred, and try to correct the behavior there.

Setting Yourself Up for Success

If you want to have a successful and positive relationship with your pet, you need to set yourselves up correctly from the get-go.

Everyone makes mistakes when training their dogs, and you will too. It's important that you do not beat yourself up for your mistakes, but rather, work diligently to correct them. The longer you go on making these mistakes, the harder it will be to get the behavior you are aiming for.

Training your puppy or new dog is a rewarding and bonding experience when executed correctly, and you should be having fun when doing so! Keep your patience high, your expectations reasonable, and your punishments low. As long as you are enjoying the ride, you are already well on your way!