Six behaviors every dog should know

part 2

By Stephanie Colman, San Fernando Valley Dogs Examiner

A well trained dog is a happy dog!

Dog training is simple, but it's not easy! Time, patience and consistency are the keys to a well trained dog. In deciding what to train, the possibilities are endless, but some behaviors may be more useful than others. In this article,we examine **six key behaviors** that, when mastered, help make for a harmonious relationship between dog and owner.

1. Quick response to his name
2. Coming when called
3. Proper recreational chewing
4. Sit
5. Play skills
6. How to be alone

The list may seem a bit unconventional -- some of items are more "concepts" than "behaviors," but I'll make the argument that dogs who have truly mastered everything on the list are not only a joy to live with, but can also be safely kept out of most any type of trouble or harmful situation.

In this installment, we'll look at the importance of, and how to achieve a quick response to the dog's name, along with the art of proper recreational chewing.

Quick Response to Name – For the life of your dog, the most difficult part of getting him to comply with any request will be the ability to get and maintain his attention. For example, if he's not paying attention when you ask him to sit, his butt won't likely hit the floor. (Sound familiar? Ever tried to get your distracted spouse or family member to do something? "Honey... would you close the door? Honey? The door. Would you please close the door.... HELLO!) This is a great early behavior to teach a puppy, because it helps him learn his name in the first place.

Start with your puppy or dog on a leash and some treats in your pocket. Practice in a familiar environment without a lot of distractions. Stand relatively still and allow your dog to pay attention to his surroundings. As he's doing so, start saying his name in a happy, upbeat voice. You may have to say it two or three times before he turns around and looks at you, almost as if to say, "Are you talking to me?" As soon as he orients himself to you, happily say, "GOOD!" or "Yes!" or click if you're using a clicker and give him a treat. Timing is important. You want to mark the behavior (your "good!" "yes!" or click is the marker signal) the instant he's turned and is looking at you. You're rewarding the fact that your dog has acknowledged that you two share space on the same planet! He doesn't have to hold your gaze. All he has to do it make the choice to turn away from the environment in favor of looking to you so that you can, when necessary, give him further instruction.

If he's especially distracted and you've had to say his name more than a couple times, try making a kissy-face noise, pat your leg or playfully poke him to help gain his attention. Make a note of the surroundings and try to find a slightly less distracting place to practice next time.

Most dogs catch on quickly and you'll soon find that you only have to say his name once before he turns and looks at you. You may also find that after the first try, he won't STOP looking at you! When that's the case, it's time to practice in a new area that's slightly more distracting. Practice this behavior a little and often for the life of your dog. It's a simple behavior that goes a long way toward paving a solid foundation of teamwork and obedience.

Recreational Chewing – Dogs need to chew. As puppies, it's a huge part of how they explore the world around them, as well as part of the teething process. In adolescent and adult dogs, chewing relieves boredom and can reduce stress. The trick is to teach your dog the fine art of recreational chewing i.e., what he's allowed to chew vs. what he's not.

When you first bring your puppy or rescue dog home, be sure to have plenty acceptable chew items on hand. Durable Nylabones, hollow sterilized bones and bully sticks are among my favorites. Whatever you decide to keep on hand, make a point to redirect your dog's inappropriate chewing to an approved item and then calmly

praise him for making a better choice. You can also set up training sessions for recreational chewing. Settle in with your dog and hold one end of his chew bone while he works on the other end. Calmly praise and pet him as your share the bone. If you sense that he's uncomfortable with you holding his bone as he chews it, contact a qualified trainer, as this is often the first sign of a resource guarding problem.

Whenever you spot your dog choosing to lie down and enjoy a bone, make a special point to praise him so that he learns you really like it when he lies quietly with his chew stick. It's important to catch your dog in the act of doing something good – not just catching him in the act on chewing on your coffee table legs! The more you reinforce your dog for lying quietly and chewing his bone, the more he'll want to do it. Pretty soon it becomes one of his favorite jobs, and when you need him to occupy himself, you can suggest that he go lie down and have a good chew.

Dog Trainer Tip: If your dog initially snubs a Durable Nylabone, try trading for a friend's dog's chewed bone. For many dogs, ABC Bones (Already Been Chewed Bones) are better than new ones! You can also make Nylabones seem more interesting by paying attention to them yourself. Make a point to pick it up off the floor while in view of your dog, and closely inspect it for a while. Pretend to offer it to your dog, extending it his direction, but pull it away before he makes contact. Drop it on the floor and quickly snatch it back up. Make it seem like the most valuable thing in the entire house. Chances are that your attention to it will make your dog think twice about leaving it behind.

When training a dog, think in terms of a little and often. Spending just a few short minutes several times a day will do wonders for helping create your ideal canine companion. While you're training, don't forget about management. The easiest way for your dog to learn what you want, is to be unable to practice what you don't!

How to be Alone

Dogs are extremely social animals; it's a huge part of what makes them wonderful companions for humans. We want to spend as much time as possible with our canine friends, but it's important that they also learn how to be alone. Being alone isn't a skill that comes naturally to dogs.

Teach your puppy or adult dog to be relaxed and confident when crated, x-penned or behind a baby gate while away from the rest of the family. Practice often for short periods of time in the beginning, gradually extending the amount of time your dog spends by himself. Leave him with something interesting to do – like work to extract his breakfast from a Buster Cube or similar food puzzle toy. Return periodically to reward (calm praise, petting and a treat) quiet, relaxed behavior, and remember never to let him out if he's making a fuss. If your dog launches into a full blown panic attack when left alone, contact a qualified trainer or applied animal behaviorist who can help you create and implement a systematic desensitization and classical conditioning program.
If you're lucky enough to work from home, be sure to set aside time to orchestrate "alone time" for your dog. Your goal is for your dog to not only understand that it's okay to be alone, but that it's okay to be separated from YOU, even when you're home. Many dogs quickly learn to relax when their owners leave for work in the morning, but struggle with being apart from them when the family is home. Teaching your dog to accept all types of alone time allows you to use confined physical separation as a means of management in training – for example, choosing to crate your dog while the family eats dinner in order to prevent him from learning to beg or jump up and steal food from the kids.

Separation and alone time is especially important in multiple dog households. Dogs will quickly develop strong bonds with their fellow canine companions. When left unchecked, the bond can become so tight that the absence of one dog creates extreme stress for the other. It's important to teach your individual dogs that they can be confident, well-adjusted individuals with or without their canine companions. Help achieve this by giving them some physical and visual apart time during the day and by walking them separately at least three days a week. When walking dogs one at a time, leave the "home alone dog" with a wonderful consolation prize such as peanut butter filled KONG toy. Make your departure and return low-key and uneventful, no matter what reaction you get from your dog.

Your goal is to create dogs who, when it's not their turn to leave for the walk, may look a bit disappointed, but who don't fall apart under stress while you're gone. You may think this is a small thing, but it goes a long way toward preparing dogs for the difficult-to-think-about bigger picture: Fast-forward 10+ years and you lose a dog. Dogs who have never been taught to exist independent of their canine house mates have a much more difficult time adjusting to the loss. Teach this important life-lesson early to avoid unnecessary stress later in life.

(For more great information on raising and training multiple dogs, check out this article. If you have, or are contemplating litter mates, please read this first.)

Play skills

The ability to interact cooperatively during something fun like a game is a great relationship builder for dogs and their humans. Play is a hot topic in the dog training community right now. In 2008, at least two dog training books were dedicated to the subject: Play With Your Dog by Pat Miller, CPDT, CDBC and Play Together, Stay Together by Patricia McConnell, Ph.D. and Karen London, Ph.D. I've read and highly recommend both. Says Miller:

"There is clearly a social benefit resulting from play between dogs and their humans. One of the reasons dogs hold their lofty position as Man's (or Woman's) Best Friend, is that they share our joy of playing. While most species romp and play as juveniles, dogs and humans are among the few who continue to play enthusiastically into old age."

No wonder humans are such fans of dogs. As McConnell points out, we're both basically modern day Peter Pans!

There are lots of games to play with your dog, and really, with a little creativity and a good attitude, anything you do with your dog (yes, anything – even training!) can (and should!) be a game. Tug games and retrieve games top my list of important games to teach dogs.

Tug Games -- I LOVE tugging with my dogs! When I first met my Golden Retriever, Quiz, at the airport, he was a tiny, 8-week-old puppy. The very first thing I did after giving him a chance to go potty was to play a short game of tug with a small braided fleece toy. "Welcome to California, little puppy! I'm your new mom. Look how much fun we're having!"

In my opinion and experience, there are many benefits to playing tug games. When played with a few important rules, tug games are great for building focus around distractions, teaching "give" and demonstrating self-control. To help make the game enjoyable for all involved, as well as a positive learning experience for the dog, keep the following points in mind:

Play the game with a reasonably sized toy. Your toy should have enough space for your hand at one end, the dog's mouth at the other and a lot of "neutral ground" in between. This is important for implementing the second important point:

Teach your dog that teeth on clothing or skin immediately turns off the game. Dogs can learn to have impeccable aim if we expect it. Many people think that tooth-to-hand/clothing contact is accidental the part of the dog. Sometimes? Sure. Accidents happen. More likely however, the contact was intentional on the part of the dog in his effort to take the game to the next level of excitement. Watch dogs when they play. The more exciting the game becomes, the more likely you are to see play-biting. It's often used as the canine equivalent of someone saying, "OK... BRING IT!" on the ball court!

Whatever the reason, dogs should be taught to keep their teeth to themselves during tug games. The instant his teeth make contact, simply say, "Too bad," and turn your back as you completely disengage from your dog. If you happen to have possession of the toy at the time, protect it so your dog can't mug you for it and walk away. If the dog is attached to the toy at the moment of inappropriate contact, just let go. It may seem that he's "won" by getting to keep the toy, but fear not: the game is nowhere near as fun without your help. After all, it takes *two* to tug! Resume the game after several seconds. No need to be angry, yell at your dog or hold a grudge. It's simple cause and effect. Teeth on skin or clothing makes the game stop. Period. Consistency matters. The game must stop every time, with every player, whether or not the contact was uncomfortable.

While playing, keep an eye on your dog's excitement level. The more excited he gets, the harder it is to practice good manners. Help him keep his head by interspersing bits of simple self-control with sit, down or his favorite trick. Tug for several seconds, ask him to drop the toy and hide it behind your back, then ask for a sit. His reward for sitting is your willingness to resume the tug game! If your dog is reluctant to drop the toy, practice trading for a treat and work toward weaning off the food as your dog begins to understand the word "give" or "drop it." Not only should your dog learn to let go when you ask, he should also learn to be patient and not mug you for the toy. As he's sitting, if he tries to jump up and snatch the toy before you officially start or re-start the game, use your body

to block his attempt and ask him to sit once again. Help remind your dog that compliance earns wonderful things.

Dog Trainer Tip: Remember that your attention to something helps make it more valuable. Try designating a couple of your dog's favorite toys as special training toys. Keep them in a hard-to-reach place like on top of the refrigerator. Just like with the Nylabones, inspect the toy regularly in view of your dog, sometimes pretending to offer it to him but withdrawing it as he starts to show interest. When he shows real interest, put the toy away. Treating the tug toy like Forbidden Fruit can help build his desire for it when you decide it's time to play.

Retrieve – Retrieve games are about sharing. While some breeds are naturally more inclined to want to retrieve, most dogs can develop the skill over time. The following tricks can help build or strengthen your dog's retrieve:

Before throwing the toy, make sure your dog appears interested in it. Jolly him up with the toy, teasing him just a little bit. When he's actively trying to get the toy, give it a toss. Make sure he sees you throw it. If he runs out and picks up the toy, cheer him on and back away as you casually call him to you. "Good boy.... C'mon... bring it.... Good boy!" works well. Don't just stand there. Back up or even run away from your dog to encourage him to move toward you. If he drops the toy while en route, dash out there and pick it up yourself, coveting it a bit. Tease him a little and throw it again when he's interested. When he brings you the toy, DON'T REACH FOR IT. Let him enjoy it for several seconds while you pet and praise him. We want him to think that it's always best to be next to you when he has something wonderful. Help him think he's super clever for having retrieved the toy. "Ohmygosh... what do you haaaaave? Ohhhhhh! You have a tooooy!" (Have I mentioned that the best dog trainers probably don't embarrass easily?)

After several seconds, if he hasn't dropped the toy on his own, work your "drop it" or "give," and repeat the process if your dog is excited about the game. For willing retrievers, I like to ask for a "sit" or "down" before each throw – just another way to reinforce that my dog and I are a team and we must both do things to keep each other happy. Always be sure to end the game before your dog loses interest. For newer retrievers, that may be after just one or two throws in the beginning. Quit while you're ahead and leave him wanting more!

Dog Trainer Tips: Never let a tossed toy lie unattended. As soon as your dog seems to lose interest, run out there, pick up the toy and play with it yourself. Don't let him think the toy is worth ignoring. Remember that your attention to the toy can make it valuable.

If your dog likes to tour the yard with the toy but is reluctant to bring it back to you, try playing on leash. Keep your throws short and help gently guide your dog back to you. Once he's there, DON'T REACH FOR THE TOY. He's likely become resistant to bringing it to you because he doesn't want to give it up. Let him hold it while you pet and praise him.

If you have trouble finding a toy your dog is interested in enough to want to run after, tightly tie some treats in a bandanna or look for a squeaky toy with a Velcro squeaker pouch. Make sure the dog cannot get to the food on his own. Start by just barely tossing the food-stuffed toy on the ground. When your dog picks it up or even just mouths it a little, excitedly open it up for him and feed a treat. The idea is for the dog to learn that he needs your thumbs in order to gain access to the food. Gradually toss the toy farther away as his skill level increases. When he gets good at it, try transitioning to a modified tennis ball. Cut a slit into a tennis ball, insert a few treats and squeeze open the slit to release the food when he brings it back.

Quick recall training -f teaching your dog how to leave distractions.

By now, your dog should be responding with a quick turn your direction and an eager expression as he races toward you upon hearing his special recall word. Thanks to all your early foundation training, he's learning to anticipate a reward-fest of epic proportions when he gets to you. That's perfect! Remember: the goal in recall training is to teach the dog that his magic word means, "Quick – get to your human as fast as you can because something really, really, REALLY good is going to happen!"

This early foundation step (calling your dog, running away and having a big party), should be practiced and heavily reinforced for the life of your dog. Practice everywhere: at home, on hikes, on walks around the neighborhood or while out exploring new urban locations. Consider it your default training maneuver.

People often ask how often they should practice recall training. My answer: A LOT! To be a bit more specific, in my opinion and experience, it takes hundreds of repetitions of pairing your recall word with the huge party to follow before coming when called starts to become reflexive for a dog. Fortunately, you can accomplish 100 repetitions faster than you think. For example:

Five Repetitions in a Row x Four Training Sessions = 20 Reps per Day.

In this example, each training session (five repetitions) can be accomplished in approximately three minutes, for a total of 12 mins a day. The ability to potentially save your dog's life with a good recall is DEFINITELY worth an investment of 12 mins a day! Practice daily and after just one week, you'll have completed 140 repetitions.

One of the biggest mistakes people make in recall training is to practice a handful of times at home and then expect the word to work out in the real world and against distractions. It's critically important that you adequately train your dog before you start testing him. For now, save your recall word for training. Our goal is to train the word so much, we've successfully stacked the deck in our favor that it will work in an emergency.

Distractions

Perhaps the biggest hurdle in recall training is teaching a dog to leave a distraction when called. A dog's willingness to do so is what makes or breaks an effective recall. When a dog is loose or otherwise off-leash, he's going to be distracted. Therefore, it's important to convince him that it's always best to leave distractions and come when we call -- no matter how enticing the distraction! A tall order? Sure. Impossible? Not at all.

If you've been doing your early recall homework for just two weeks, your dog has already been generously rewarded close to 300 times for running to you. That gives him a great head-start on this next step. To be fair to your dog, please do not attempt this next step before completing the early training. Teach your dog to walk before expecting him to run.

With your dog STILL ON A LEASH, walk him up to a low-level distraction like a familiar bush or tree. Allow him to investigate and as he does, step behind him and go to the end of the leash with your treats at-the-ready, yet hidden in your hand behind your back. Happily call him with his name (which remember, you're separately teaching him means, 'Hey! Look to me for further instruction!") and his emergency recall word. Be ready for one of two things to happen:

He eagerly whips his head around, leaving the distraction and rushing toward you full speed ahead! As this happens, remember to move away from him, allowing him to chase you for a few steps and then proceed to party like a rock star with praise, petting, treats and lots of general merriment that lasts at least 20 seconds. Or:

Your recall word seems to fall on deaf ears as your dog says, "Talk to the paw!" and continues investigating the distraction. If this happens, don't panic. Simply give a slight nudge on your dog's leash or run up and playfully poke him in the butt. The goal is to cause him to quickly turn around and check in, almost as if he's saying, "Oh, I'm sorry… did you call me?" When you see his fuzzy little face, that's your opportunity to hold his attention as you repeat his recall word and run away, rewarding generously after a few steps. Please be clear: I'm not advocating a vicious leash-pop. We're trying to get his attention, not punish him.

Even if you have to remind him of his job (leaving the distraction and coming to you) you're STILL going to party like a rock star. In fact, if he needed the reminder, you almost need to party MORE than if he'd turned and run after you all on his own. Sounds backward, doesn't it? Think of it this way: If your dog needed the nudge, he's telling you that he doesn't yet believe that you can be more fun than distractions. Your job is to prove otherwise. If he needed the extra nudge, he's telling you he needs more practice at the easier level without distractions. Our goal in training is to teach the dog to want to leave distractions because we're more fun – not because he'll get in trouble if he doesn't.

In training my own dogs, I make a point to practice at least 10 leashed call-offs (calling them away from distractions) on every walk. I also use their emergency recall word every time I place a bowl of food. I'm careful about when I choose to use the emergency word when they're off leash under normal circumstances (like hiking or playing with dog pals), and I make a point to reward generously each and every time I call them and they come to me, pairing petting and praise with the delivery of treats to raise the value of my non-food rewards. I also make a point to call my dogs to me several times just to reward them like crazy and turn them loose again – that way, they never suspect that being called means it's time to leash up and go home, thus ending the fun.

As a result of this continued training and practice, I'm proud to say that both my dogs have respectable recalls. Are they perfect? Of course not! No dog is. Sometimes I call one of them, thinking I'm 95% sure the dog in question will spin on a dime and run back to me, only to discover that I lost the bet! I salvage the moment by excitedly calling the dog again with a casual word ("C'mon… let's go!") vs. repeating my emergency word, "Here!" and run away to encourage the dog to chase me. When the dog comes, I still reward like crazy (ALWAYS reward

when he gets to you, no matter what!) and remind myself that it's time for some more leashed recalled training practice. Whenever possible, I try to pinpoint what distraction caused the recall to fail, and train (leashed) specifically with that. Remember: Training happens on a leash. Testing is what happens when your dog is off-leash. The more you train, the better your dog will do on the test!

Sit: The final behavior in my list of six things every dog should know

No matter how you teach it, sit can be used a number of ways in training. It's the perfect alternate behavior to redirect a number of bad habits such as jumping up on people or darting out the front door, and it can easily be used to help an overly excited dog stop and re-group – sort of like a doggy Control-Alt-Delete! Additionally, a simple behavior like sit can be used as a dog's way of saying please in an attempt to earn the things he wants, teaching him that compliance is the key to opening the door to everything good in his world.

While the possibilities in dog training are endless, these six behaviors (quick response to his name, coming when called, recreational chewing, play skills, how to be alone and sit) go a long way toward creating a canine companion that is a safe, well-mannered joy to live with. Best of all, in training these behaviors, you just might find yourself hooked on having fun with your dog. You both should be so lucky!

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