

Choosing a Dog Trainer as Though Your Dog's Life Depends On It

As pet guardians we've heard too many [horror stories](#) to approach choosing a trainer lightly. Those who think all trainers are created equal are setting themselves up for disappointment. Our hope is to awaken other pet guardians, particularly first-timers, to some of the red flags that indicate a trainer may be dangerous.

The pet training industry is rife with individuals willing to bully and intimidate your dog into what they refer to as obedience. Veterinarians, behaviour specialists & certified trainers treat many dogs after punishing training methods have left them traumatized and suffering physical injuries. The understandings we have today may change tomorrow, but cruelty will always be cruelty. Punishment-based trainers will shock, roll, pinch, jab, choke, hang, kick, and punch dogs under the guise of training. Despite world-renowned animal experts loudly denouncing aversive 'training methods' as unnecessary, outdated, and cruel, the message is not reaching pet guardians in time.

No one knows your dog as well as you do, and dogs raised with respect, kindness, and patience usually do not need formal training. However, if you do need additional help, a qualified trainer with a solid understanding of learning theory, canine behaviour and body language is invaluable. They are observant, insightful, and know the right questions to ask. These are essential skills for evaluating a dog's unique personality and temperament and the underlying reasons for their behaviour. Choosing a dog trainer with a "cookie cutter" mentality is a clear sign the trainer lacks competency.

When looking for a trainer, pet guardians must not be swayed by fancy websites, imposing looking logos, and testimonials without further investigation. For some dog training franchises, the ability to pay the franchise fee is the only criterion needed to own one. Know what the logos being displayed mean and what they represent. Some logos can serve as a warning not to use that trainer if the logo is linked to an association that permits their trainers to use aversive tools and techniques. Keep in mind the training industry is unregulated, and anyone can call themselves a trainer. Avoid trainers who advocate dominance theory, shock collars, and forceful tactics. These are trainers who allude to wolf packs and the need to be the leader. If a trainer insists your dog has a problem that you don't see, is spoiled, or is a sissy move on and find another trainer.

Tools Permitted	YES	NO	Methods Permitted	YES	NO
Shock			Rewards		
Prong			Punishment		
Choke			Praise/Games		
Halties			Dominance		
Harness			Spray bottles		
Clickers			Isolation		
Muzzles			Force / Pressure		
Crates			Science based R+		
Food / Toys			Withholding food & Water		

Always inquire if a trainer uses these tools and methods.

Dog trainers who identify as “balanced” trainers use this title to sound emotionally mature and to give pet owners the wrong notion. Balanced means they use punishing tools and techniques. A trainer who identifies as balanced is a red flag. Their claim that punishment rehabilitates aggressive dogs is particularly unfounded and dangerous. Punishment suppresses behaviour; it doesn’t resolve it. [Aggression begets aggression](#). It is highly recommended pet guardians consult with a certified animal behaviourist or veterinary behaviourist for aggressive dogs. The latter possess both medical and behavioural knowledge, which can be important if an unwanted behaviour is caused by physical pain, which is often the case.

Additional red flags to watch for are promises and guarantees. Dogs are not things. As [sentient beings](#), every dog is as complex and unique as we are. A trainer who promises a miracle or quick fix is a warning they are an amateur at best. Everyone’s learning style is different. Yet, we all learn best when we feel supported, safe, and receive feedback and guidance in the form of praise and rewards. I don’t know of anyone who would want to be taught with electric shocks, do you?

Scientifically proven reward-based methods of training are endorsed by animal [experts and organizations](#). You can begin your search for a reputable trainer using the links below. The wide disparity in education, skills, experience, methods, and ethics means finding a competent trainer will take more than a brief Google search. Any trainer you employ should possess respect for animal sentience, an understanding of learning theory, and the application of humane training techniques. Finding a knowledgeable trainer is imperative, yet can be challenging, as not all certificates and logos signify equivalent validity and standards. Nor does a certificate measure ethics or compassion. Be sure to ask a prospective trainer about their personal philosophy and affiliations, and take note of their attitude as well as their training methods. Psychopaths earn degrees too and there are more of them around than most people think. Ask a trainer directly: Do you ever use physical force, shock, prong or choke, or grot collars, head halters, or any other aversive tools and techniques? Always visit the trainer’s facilities and observe them conducting a training session. To ensure your pet is treated humanely, we recommend you stay with your pet during training sessions. Refrain from using board & train businesses.

Find Competent Trainers & Training Tips Here

- [The Academy for Dog Trainers](#)
- [The Pet Professional Guild](#)
- [International Positive Dog Training Association](#)
- [Animal Kind BCSPCA](#)
- [Do No Harm Dog Training & Behavior Handbook](#)
- [Alberta Force Free Alliance](#)
- [Positively Victoria Stilwell](#)
- [Dog Trainers of Europe](#)