

SOME SENSIBLE TRAINING ADVICE FOR YOUR PUPPY.

The awe inspiring size of these big dogs presents their human companions with a long list of training and management challenges not encountered by keepers of small dogs. Some are simple logistical challenges. Exactly how big a vehicle do you need to accommodate a couple of Bullmastiffs? Not to mention the extra space in you master bedroom if you plan to crate a few in your personal den. And imagine the ease with which a tail can clear a coffee table or swipe expensive porcelain from its display shelf.

Everything about prevention through management and training goes triple for big dogs. Teaching good manners when your wee one is a mere 8 - 10 kg gives a huge advantage over those who wait till 12 months, by which time the out of control 60kg Bullmastiff may already be gearing up to maul an innocent neighbour. These dogs forbidding size demands an early course in juvenile good manners. Whilst your visiting aunt may be willing to tolerate the petite paw prints of a poodle on her pantsuit, she is likely to frown on plate sized mud covered feet on the front of her cashmere sweater.

Socialisation is another critically vital part of a dog's educational experience. Many giant breeds have strongly defined guarding instincts. A poorly socialised, poorly trained large dog is a significant risk to the community.

A well socialised and trained dog will be able to turn on his protective behaviours if needed, but no matter his size will be safe to have around your friends and family.



TALL TRAINING TIPS

There are a number of good manners behaviours that are particularly important to teach your large dog while he is still small.

Polite Greeting: as mentioned above, jumping up to greet humans is rude behaviour for any canine and especially intolerable for a large dog. Start when your puppy is small by avoiding the temptation to pick up and cuddle him (Cuddling teaches that "up" is a wonderful place to be). Instead designate a spot on the floor as "Cuddle Space" and get down on his level to do cuddle time. Teach "sit" as a greeting behaviour by consistently and generously rewarding your puppy for sitting and turning away and stepping away anytime he jumps up. Insist that family and friends only greet him when he is sitting

Loose Lead Walking: If you begin teaching loose lead walking to your young pup you will never find yourself skiing down the street as your dog takes off after a skateboard rider. The keys to reaching good loose lead walking are:

1. A high rate of reinforcement
2. Very high value treats. You want to make sure that it's more rewarding for your dog to pay attention to you than his surroundings

Say Please: A say please program teaches your dog to ask for all good things in life by offering a sit in order to get what he wants. This prevents him from learning that he can push people around by virtue of his sheer weight and size. You can initially train and ask for the sit behaviour but your ultimate goal is for the dog to offer sit without being told. If he is allowed on the furniture, he sits and waits to be invited rather than helping himself to the empty space next to a visitor. Want to go outside? Sit makes the door open. Ready for dinner? Sit makes the dinner bowl descend to the floor.

Off/Leave it: It stands to reason that giant breed dogs have easier access to food bearing surfaces such as tables and kitchen counters. One chance encounter with a roast beef sandwich can turn a dog into a dedicated counter surfer. In addition to managing your big dog so he never has the opportunity to learn to counter surf, a well installed "Off" or "leave it" cue which tells the dog to back away from whatever he is looking at can avert disaster when he has that "Mine!" gleam in his eyes and is closer to the Christmas turkey than you are.

Sharing with Others: Like so many other things, resource guarding by a large dog can be infinitely more disastrous than the same problem presented by a smaller breed. When your pup is small teach her that having humans approach her when she is eating or otherwise occupied with a high value possession makes more good stuff happen. When he is eating, occasionally approach and drop a few exquisite goodies into it. Before long he will want people to be around when he is eating.

Give: The last thing you want to do is get into an argument with a big dog over something he has in his mouth. Take time to teach your dog "give" by trading for treats.

Most people make the mistake of only taking "forbidden" objects from a dog, which can teach the dog to object, since he learns that he'll never get it back. If you practice "Give" with a legal

toy you can return the toy after the dog gives it up for a treat. This way the dog learns that he gets two rewards, the first for giving up the toy, the second when he gets it back.

SOME TIPS FOR A SAFE AND REWARDING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR BULLMASTIFF & YOUR CHILDREN.

Happy Families - Dogs and Children

A few generations ago, our forebears were fond of depicting dogs and children together in art and often showed them in an obviously trusting and loving relationship. This relationship has also been honoured in children's literature, ranging from Lassie to Peter Pan, and today generations have grown up not only having experienced wonderful times with childhood pets, but wishing their own children to have the same experience and, with a few simple considerations, they will.

A dog needs to be a part of his "human family". Left to his own devices in the backyard, lonely, bored, uneducated in simple canine good manners and unused to being handled, he is often eventually discarded as being "unsuitable for the children".

Puppies must be taught not to use their mouth on humans, even in play. They must be taught to tolerate having their ears, mouth, feet and tail handled and to allow food to be taken from their mouth. All these experiences will help ensure that the puppy is tolerant of any children who perform these actions. Teaching the puppy to sit before being patted will ensure that the dog does not jump for attention and knock children down.

Puppy pre-schools and obedience classes are excellent for the first time dog owner to learn how to get the dog responding to his wishes.

Young children's lives are a continuous learning experience - not to play with power points, not to run across a road, not to hit a sibling etc, and learning how to play with the family dog is as important, yet simple, as learning these other lessons.

Although many dogs will tolerate almost any behaviour from children, they should not be required to do so. Children who are not taught that it is very wrong to hit, kick, pinch or torment their own dog may one day meet a dog who is not so tolerant.

Children should be seated before picking up a puppy, as a squirming puppy will usually be dropped. A "safe" area should be provided where the puppy can go for rest and children should be told that they must not disturb him. Over-tired children and dogs both get cranky!

Many families with older dogs face the situation of introducing a new baby to the family dog. Parents are usually well aware of how to prevent an older child from becoming jealous of a new baby and, with very little modification, these same principles can be applied to introducing a new baby into a dog's routine.

It is part of good parenting to supervise all activities of babies and small children, and their time with the family dog should be no exception until parents are confident that both the child and dog are of an age where they can understand how to play gently and reliably together.

A few basic things for parents to instil in their children are:

Children should be taught not to run up to strange dogs but to ask the owners permission to pat the dog. They should be taught not to hug strange dogs, or to reach over the dog's head to pat it on top of the head.

If a dog is uneasy or tired of playing with children and tries to get away from them, they must not follow it.

Dog owners should observe the following guidelines with visiting children:

Dogs which are unused to children may be uneasy with their movements and sounds. If a dog is uneasy with visiting children he is better secured in a favourite area where the children cannot go to him.

Don't try and force your dog to allow a child to pat or play with it.

The best relationship between dogs and children, whether active or quiet children, is between a good natured, kindly child and a good natured, good mannered and trusting dog who will listen to their woes, watch television with them, play ball, love them unconditionally and remain in their memories for the rest of their lives.

