



SAN TAN CANINE TRAINING NEWSLETTER

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PETTING YOUR DOG

It may seem strange that dog trainers would even presume an owner needs advice on how to pet their own dog. Many owners make assumptions about what feels good and/or has a good effect on their dog.

LET'S LEARN SOME BACKGROUND

Dogs interpret and experience touching differently than we as humans do. Dogs used to live in groups, in the company of other dogs. Their wolf DNA and memories include instinctive "doggie etiquette". Dogs were very physical with one another, and they sent lots of messages with touch – some loving, some assertive, some aggressive.

Although our pets understand that WE ARE not dogs, rubbing and petting them the wrong way can still transmit an unintended message or create tension.

Dogs don't particularly enjoy being banged on the top of the head – would you?

Many dogs don't enjoy being enthusiastically roughed up behind the ears – it's annoying!

Shy dogs should be scratched under the chin and the chest can be rubbed – it's very loving, comforting and is totally non-threatening.

If you don't want a dog that rolls over on its back the minute you reach down to pet it, stay away from excessive belly rubs!

All in all – calming, loving caresses would be much preferred – and your dog will love you all the more!

EVERYONE TALKS ABOUT SOCIALIZING YOUR DOG – JUST WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

The best way to explain what a "socialized" dog is, would be to tell you a story about what it isn't.

We had a dog in our care that was 6 months old. An outgoing, friendly, happy, seemingly well-adjusted, but "just not trained" young dog. After some initial training indoors (first rule of training – you train with no distraction) she was ready for her first walk. In the driveway there was a newspaper, just delivered. She was afraid to walk by it. At the front of the building, on the curb, was a large trash collection can, she was terrified. Just a few easy feet away was a parked car.

No way! Here is a dog that spent the first 6 months of her life in the backyard during the day, and inside in the evening when her owners came home – loved, cuddled, petted...but not socialized.

"Socializing" has become a buzzword of new puppy owners who seem, to our dismay, to interpret that as a directive to take their puppies to a dog park to "interact" (ignore your owner and jump and nip any dog who is smaller than you) with other dogs or go to a puppy class.

The reality is, when you take an untrained dog or pup to a group class, all that is happening is you are reinforcing that YOU are not as important as the other dogs (which is your dog's natural response to the presence of other dogs). If you honestly expect your dog to learn something in one of these classes, get ready for disappointment. You will probably end up frustrated, disappointed, embarrassed and one of the more than 50% that drop out!

So, just what is a socialized dog? A socialized dog has been exposed to lots of new situations, under the guiding hand of their owner and has learned some desensitization to new stimuli – i.e. noises, people, dogs nearby. Just imagine yourself to be a puppy just plucked from the comfort of mom and the litter and, all of the sudden, someone is running a vacuum cleaner or garbage disposal. Everything new is frightening. The same goes for the sample we described above, a dog confined to the backyard found the presence of a parked car or trash bin (things she had never seen before) threatening.

TIP: Never comfort a frightened dog, you will only be reinforcing their reaction!

You can see why it is important that you have some training in "raising your puppy" so you can start the process of introducing your pup/dog to new things and people.

So, do socialize your puppy – start your puppy training, gain your pup's confidence and then and only then, start introducing your dog to new situations.

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