

Biggest complaint I hear as a trainer

I have been working as a dog trainer for over 10 years now. I have worked with everything from labs and St. Bernards to Chihuahuas. I have experienced my fair share of dog bites, fights, tears and frustrated owners. Before we dive into common problems we dog owners experience, I want to examine three common things every pet owner should know about.

When I meet a new client I always start with a few simple questions of my own. Do you walk your dog? Do you play with your dog? Do you psychologically exercise your dog?

Sure some of us walk our dog; however it tends to be on the same path every day for the same amount of time. This of how boring this is for your pet. They only know a small amount of the world and it's always the same. Same smells, same people, same pets, or lack thereof. Then there are the people who simply say that they only walk their dog occasionally but that the dog has free range of the back yard. Sure dogs enjoy this as they can smell, run and do whatever they want. However, it doesn't take dogs long to get bored and look for creative ways to entertain themselves. This could be excessive barking, digging, running away or chasing other animals.

If we are being honest, most dog owners stop playing with their dogs once they are out of puppy hood. Why does this matter? Well, first of all, dogs were bred to perform a job, and to a lot of dogs their job is a form of play. Searching, hunting, herding, guarding, guiding etc. Every dog needs a job. The breed depends on what kind of job they love to do. Find something that excites your dog and is something they want to continue to do. An example is a lab I once had who loved tennis balls. Yes she loved to play fetch and would for hours if I let her, but I also wanted to tire out her mind as well. So I would have her sit and stay in one room while I went and hid her tennis ball in another room. Upon my return I would have her go and search for her favourite toy. This game would both tire her physically and psychologically, which brings me to my last question.

Not many owners exercise their dog's mind or even have an idea of how to do so. This connects closely to playing with your dog. Again, depending on the breed, and your dog's personality this will change what type of games your play. Create a way for your husky to pull your child's sled in the winter or wagon in the summer, find different ways for your lab to play fetch, or search, take your border collie to a farm and let it experience herding. The possibilities are endless.

So why does any of this matter? Well if you don't give your dog a job to do it will find one of its own, which can be the cause of a lot of destructive behaviour, or not listening to humans' wants. If you don't play with your dog they can become bored, lazy, overweight or even depressed, which in turn makes it not want to do much of anything, especially whatever you are asking of them. Lastly, if your dog is bored mentally it again will find something to do on their own which is usually not something their humans want.

Where do you start from here? Well first off spend time with your dog. Go outside with him/her and run around, play chase, fetch, find whatever your dog is into. Next change up your walks; find new walking trails, a pond to go swimming, a new dog park or a friend's back yard. Any new environment to get you dog's nose and mind working. Stop and think about your dog and his/her personality. Does it love to run and hunt, play fetch? Even chasing animals can be turned into a mental game. If it loves to hunt, then speak to a local hunter to obtain a tail of an animal. Drag this around your yard and place it somewhere at the end of this path. Have your dog locate the scent, follow the trail and locate the ?animal.? If it loves to play fetch change up the toys you use, the ways you throw, how many objects you use at once, anything to keep your dog's mind engaged. Your dog likes to chance animals? Turn this into a game for your dog to be able to chance squirrels or rabbits off your property and away from your gardens. All of these ?games? give your dog a job and a sense of fulfillment.

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