



Balance and Structure

All our clients must see themselves as dog trainers to succeed. A dog trainer must be able to see things from a neutral perspective, the closer we are to a problem, the harder it will be to see a solution. One of my biggest issues when I first started training was empathy. I let dogs jump all over me, I rewarded overstimulated behavior with affection, and I was not good about setting boundaries because everything dogs did was just oh so cute. I felt bad about applying any type of pressure or not giving a dog attention and as a result some of my dogs didn't turn out as great as they could have been. When we anthropomorphize dogs we end up treating them like humans, thus perceiving them to have human like intelligence. This is a serious error that can cause a toxic and tumultuous relationship between human and animal, as the dog can start viewing the human as a "dog" to compete with rather than a human that provides comfort, shelter, food, and structure as part of a mutually beneficial bond. We want to think like a dog and communicate similar to a dog in order to better connect with our furry children, but we don't want to be seen as a dog. Creating a healthier bond with your animal will help promote the flow of a more assertive and confident energy. As a result of promoting a more productive energy within your pack, you will begin to notice an increase of focus and mindful behavior in your dog leading to better choices. Our goal as dog trainers is to create balance with structure and structure with balance to ensure optimal mental health in our dogs. It is important to point out that a dog that has structure isn't always balanced and a dog with mental balance doesn't always have structure. Let's go over some solutions to common obedience and behavioral issues and figure out how you can better achieve pack serenity!

Balance

Physical Exercise

Dogs have a natural need for physical activity. In the wild, dogs spend a significant portion of their day hunting and scavenging for food, which involves a lot of movement. Regular exercise helps to meet this instinctual need, keeping them fit and reducing the risk of obesity and related health problems. Dogs can walk or run with ease and most only get one to two walks a day. I personally think walks are more for enrichment than exercise, allowing the dog to satiate their need to roam as well as stimulate olfactory senses. Using a flirt pole, playing fetch, jogging with your dog, or even training your dog on the treadmill is far more effective for cardiovascular health.

Mental Stimulation

Dogs are intelligent animals that require mental challenges to stay sharp and avoid boredom. In the wild, they would have to solve problems to find food and shelter. Providing puzzle toys, training sessions, and interactive play can satisfy this need for mental engagement. Teaching them to track food and treats is another great way to provide stimulation and create better engagement with their handler.

Social Interaction

Dogs are pack animals by nature. They have an instinctual need for social interaction with both humans and other dogs. Regular socialization helps them learn appropriate behaviors, promotes bite inhibition, and reduces anxiety and aggression. There are many trainers that state dogs don't need to fraternize outside of their pack. At METAK9 we believe that *Canis Lupus Familiaris*, or the domestic dog, has a special kind of social fluidity. This flexibility in interpersonal skills allows for social learning to take place with canine peers outside of the human-dog pack; a necessary evolution as we can teach a dog to behave, but we can't teach a dog to behave like a dog. Dogs are generally taken from their mother and litter mates at around six to eight weeks of age for sale or adoption. During this time they have received the high school level equivalent on life and social skills, emotional development, problem-solving, and pack politics. However, once they get to their forever home, it's the human's job to help them graduate "college" by furthering their education as they mature into adults. Allowing dogs to play in a safe environment teaches them the boundaries of the dog world and gives them a chance to play "war". When their primal needs are met and all the boxes are checked you and your dog will find peace of mind much easier to obtain. Dogs that have been isolated for most of their youth tend to demonstrate anti-social behavior and feel alienated around their species. They are more prone to conflict and behavioral issues at home that will revolve around their guardian, these symptoms will usually become exacerbated when out in public. *Fun fact: Too much playtime with dogs can create what we call, entitlement reactivity. A dog gets so used to meeting and playing with all dogs it sees that when it doesn't get its way its arousal turns to frustrated reactivity.*

Chewing and Gnawing

Chewing is highly beneficial for dogs, offering multiple advantages that contribute to their overall well-being. Firstly, it promotes dental health by helping to remove plaque and tartar buildup, which can prevent gum disease and keep their breath fresher. I have witnessed a handful of dogs with very bad teeth because of a diet consisting primarily of wet food. Additionally, chewing provides essential mental stimulation, alleviating boredom and reducing anxiety, especially in dogs left alone for extended periods. It also strengthens jaw muscles while releasing energy stored around their head and neck, providing physical exercise and an outlet for excess energy, which is particularly important for high-energy breeds and puppies. Moreover, appropriate chew toys can prevent destructive chewing behaviors by directing the dog's natural urge to chew toward suitable objects. Overall,

chewing supports dental hygiene, mental health, and behavioral management, making it an integral part of a dog's daily routine. ***Fun fact: deer antlers, marrow bones, raw non-weight bearing bones, and bully sticks make excellent chew treats.***

Hunting and Foraging

The instinct to hunt and forage is strong in dogs. Even though domestic dogs do not need to hunt for their food, activities that mimic hunting, such as fetch games, hide-and-seek, or food-dispensing toys, can help satisfy this instinctual drive. When dogs shake and tear up stuffed toys they are effectively acting out part of the predatory sequence that includes, but is not limited to stalk, chase, kill, and dissect. ***Wild dogs, such as African wild dogs (Lycaon pictus), are known for their extensive roaming behavior. On average, African wild dogs can roam between 10 to 30 kilometers (6 to 19 miles) per day***

Territorial Behavior

Dogs have a natural instinct to mark and defend their territory. While this can sometimes lead to unwanted behaviors like excessive barking or marking indoors, understanding this need can help you manage and redirect it appropriately, such as by providing a defined space that is "theirs." A fun fact about marking is the higher a male dog lifts its leg, the more full of themselves they are. Female dogs often squat when they eliminate, while male dogs aim as high as possible. When you walk your male dog by a pole or the corner of a building, watch where they sniff. They tend to sniff high first to see what other boys have left on the "message board" and then shift low to check on the ladies, maybe it has something to do with business before pleasure. When dogs mark they are leaving behind intel for the other canine members of their community. These little notes hold clues to a dog's age, maturity, health, individual identity, social status, and territory. ***Fun fact: The Akita is one of the most territorial and oldest breeds known for its loyalty and protective nature. German Shepherd, Rottweiler, Doberman Pinscher, and Molosser breeds also exhibit strong territorial instincts. These breeds are characterized by their vigilance, loyalty, and natural guarding abilities, making them excellent protectors of their homes and families.***

Exploration and Curiosity

Dogs are naturally curious and have an instinctual need to explore their environment. Regular walks in varied environments, allowing them to sniff and investigate new smells, can help fulfill this need and prevent boredom. I've had many clients tell me that they seldom walk their dogs due to having such a big backyard. While having a spacious backyard is great, it will not replace the power of a good walk. A dog who has sniffed through its backyard will in time get bored, just like a human watching the same movie over and over, eventually it starts losing its charm. In addition, they will start making a huge deal out of squirrels, critters, and people walking by to get a buzz and feel some excitement. This will turn into a bigger problem as the habit sets in when out in public. ***Fun fact: Getting your dog off-leash trained can up the thrill factor for your dog and give you more control when exploring rural areas, woodlands, and hiking trails. Just make sure you are in a safe place out in nature away from people and dogs. Watch out for snakes!!***

Grooming and Hygiene

While dogs might not have the same grooming instincts as cats, they do have an instinctual need to maintain cleanliness. Regular grooming sessions can help meet this need, as well as strengthen the bond between you and your dog. Dogs do not like feces or urine in their den. It can upset their mental health. Marking territorial boundaries is one thing, but being forced in an enclosed space that a human has let go is very bad for a dog's mental health. I have personally been to homes where clients have seemingly given up on maintaining a sanitary home. There is a reason crates work so well for potty training puppies and it's because the last thing they want to do is soil their personal space. A continual cycle of boredom can lead to self-harming and excessive grooming. A dog with no stimulation can end up licking themselves raw or engage what is called flank sucking. ***Fun fact: The frequency of grooming a dog depends on its breed, coat type, and lifestyle. Generally, short-haired breeds need brushing once a week and bathing every 1-2 months, while medium-haired breeds require brushing 2-3 times a week and bathing every 1-2 months. Long-haired breeds should be brushed daily and bathed every 1-2 weeks, and curly or wavy-haired breeds need brushing 3-4 times a week, bathing every 1-2 weeks, and professional grooming every 4-6 weeks. Double-coated breeds should be brushed at least twice a week, daily during shedding seasons, and bathed every 1-2 months. Regular nail trimming, ear cleaning, and teeth brushing are also essential for all dogs.***

Structure

Establish a Daily Routine

Dogs and humans both thrive on habits and rituals. A predictable schedule replaces chaos with order and ensures something to look forward to. Creating a daily routine is fundamental to providing structure in a dog's life. Start by setting consistent times for feeding, exercise, and sleep. Feeding your dog at the same times each day helps regulate their digestive system and provides a sense of security. Regular exercise sessions, such as walks, playtime, or training drills, should also occur at consistent times. This helps burn off energy, reduces anxiety, and promotes better behavior. Ensuring your dog has a quiet and comfortable place to sleep and rest, and encouraging regular sleep patterns, further supports their need for structure. ***Fun fact: Dogs are crepuscular, meaning they're most active at dawn and dusk. This may help explain why your dog turns your home into a Nasar track around the same time every morning and evening!***

Consistent Training and Commands

Consistent training is crucial for a well-behaved dog. At METAK9 we teach break, come, sit, down, wait, place, off, and no (we use an implied stay). Positive reinforcement methods, such as treats, praise, or toys, should be used to reward good behavior and reinforce training. Negative reinforcement and positive punishment should be utilized in a gentle and fair manner to improve the efficacy of training around tougher stimuli after you have started generalizing commands in new environments. Consistency in commands and

training methods is essential to avoid confusing the dog. All family members should use the same commands and training techniques to maintain consistency and help the dog understand what is expected of them.

A common problem is that there is usually one person who works with the dog the most in a household. This usually turns into a situation where everyone complains about the dog's behavior because it is only "good" for that one person. To ensure the dog doesn't see the rest of the family as equal peers it is critical the dog is helped to see its position within the family hierarchy. This is done by including all members of the family in the training to make sure they feel confident in the handling of the dog and the dog feels confident in their ability to lead. ***Fun fact: Use your dog's feeding time as a way to capture the excitement and motivation that comes with meals. Simply place their breakfast or dinner into a pouch and have them work for their supper. This is also a fantastic way to shift from using so many treats and get them enthusiastic about a lower value reward. While using high value rewards is a great way to boost moral, it often leads to reward dependence and may reduce how your dog perceives other forms of positive reinforcement, e.g., toys, praise, and affection.***

Boundaries, Rules, and Limitations

Establishing clear boundaries and house rules is essential for a structured environment. Decide on house rules, such as which furniture the dog is allowed on, areas that are off-limits, and acceptable behaviors. Enforce these rules consistently to avoid confusion. All household members should be aware of and adhere to these rules to maintain consistency. Proper crate training can also provide a safe and secure space for your dog, helping with housebreaking and reducing anxiety. I personally do not allow my dogs to be on my bed or furniture. I think that it can lead to relationship confusion and blurs the line between what is for humans and what is for dogs. There are only so many ways we can teach our dogs their place in the pack outside of training; when you are able to claim space, you directly and indirectly assert yourself as a figure to be respected in the dog's life. Jumping on people is another behavior that can lead to trouble. In the dog's mind there is no need to respect personal space and control their impulses. Most of the time, especially with younger pups, it is an innocent, attention seeking mechanism. However, this inappropriate behavior almost always becomes habitual and can be dangerous around children and senior citizens. Another reason to stop jumping is it empowers a dog in a negative way, teaching them that they can get into a higher, more dominant position over a human and control their movement.

Puppies should be allotted limited freedom and kept under direct supervision when not in their crate. Letting a newly acquired puppy roam around your home will not only lead to bad habits and accidents, but can result in injury and fatality. Teach them that their crate is a safe space to relax and let their guard down. They get a break and you get a break. A habit built can be a habit to break. You can even put them in the crate when your family sits down for dinner so they never learn to beg. At this stage you are teaching them everything they can and cannot do, preparing them for adulthood. Implementing a crate will pay dividends down the line when they need to go to the vet or be boarded. ***Fun fact: Dogs are den creatures by nature. This instinctual behavior stems from their wild ancestors, who used***

dens as safe, secure places to rest, raise their young, and seek refuge from predators and harsh weather.