

Red flags and green flags to look for when choosing a dog trainer

LISA SINNOTT ST PAWS TRAINING ACADEMY





Choosing a dog or puppy trainer is a big decision. Your dog will hopefully be a healthy happy and precious member of your family for years to come. The training methods that are used to teach them new behaviours and prevent undesirable ones are imperative. Techniques that use pain, fear and force can hugely compromise a dogs welfare, their happiness, their health and their wellbeing. If a dog is stressed, in pain and fearful this can come out in their behaviour; it can look like growling, snapping or biting. Dog bites are very common, and most dog bites happen by a dog the person knows.

It is currently an unregulated profession, meaning anyone can do any short webinar, or £10 Groupon course and call themselves a trainer or behaviourist. There are many trainers on TV, presumably for 'entertainment' that place dogs in risky situations, forcing them to submit and scaring them in the process. What we may not see on screen and don't see when the camera is off, is the dog's behaviour and we cannot see the internal stress that is building inside the dog, affecting their mental health and risking them becoming reactive. Putting your trust in the wrong hands can be a huge risk and can result in more engrained behavioural problems, dogs who are more unpredictable and dogs that can sadly bite. Some dog training methods are abusive, old, and have been debunked: avoid them!

Things to ask when chatting to a dog trainer

- What qualifications do you have?
- Who are these qualifications accredited by?
- Are you a member of any professional associations?
- What do you do if my dog gets it wrong?
- What do you do if my dog gets it right?
- What is your view on balanced training (this uses a mix of treats, toys but also methods such as hitting and shouting and adding aversive methods such as shake cans which can affect a dog's emotional wellbeing and potentially sensitise them to sound or cause pain in their ears)
- What happens if my dog can't learn the behaviour in full?

Things to look for in terms of equipment



A treat pouch

A harness

Food

Toys



Run if they use..

Chain collars

E collars

Water spray

Citronella spray

What to do if it just doesn't feel quite right?

Go with your gut. If your dog trainer makes you feel that you're being irritating for asking them a question, or if they make you feel – or tell you, that you are questioning their authority (! – calm down Trump), end the meeting. If you feel uncomfortable with using any training method on your dog, don't. Working with a trainer is a partnership not some authoritarian, relationship rooted in arrogance and ego. You know your dog best!

Why does the training method matter so much?

There is an outdated theory that you need to be the 'pack leader' and dominate your dog to be the top of the hierarchy and show them who's boss. It is based on some old research that was conducted with wolves and is not relevant to domestic dogs, even the researcher said so! Dogs learn through association not because they are trying to be the leader.

Yes dogs need boundaries, training and guidance. What dogs don't need is people thinking that they are trying to 'get one over on them' or 'be top of the leader'. Behaviour is what you do, not who you are, to quote the wonderful Susan Friedman. It can be dangerous thinking of dogs in this way and leads people to use heavy handed methods. Positive reinforcement (adding something to make a behaviour more likely) and negative punishment (take the reward away) are used with a host of animals including tigers and elephants!



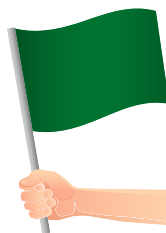
Red flags in dog training and behaviour – stop

- Something gives you the 'ick' and just does not feel right.
- You feel worried about using the methods on your dog.
- The 'trainer' suggests shouting or hitting.

·Equipment that you would be worried to use on yourself is suggested.

·In the case of aggressive behaviour the person does not recommend a vet check beforehand.

Green flags in dog training



·The trainer has accredited qualifications.

·They use methods rooted in science and that utilise minimal handling.

·If your dog gets it right they receive a reward.

If they are a behaviourist they have studied at university and been assessed

·If the dog gets it wrong the trainer breaks the class down into smaller steps (shaping).

·They change the environment to set the dog up for success.

·The trainer has reviews.



What's the law regarding dogs?



The Dangerous Dogs act states that 'if a dog is dangerously out of control in any place in England or Wales whether or not a public place the owner; and if different, the person for the time being in charge of the dog, is guilty of an offence, or, if the dog while so out of control injures any person or assistance dog an aggravated offence.'

Being dangerously out of control can include jumping up (an elderly person may have thin skin), a child is smaller and can get knocked over.

Where can I find out more? Click on the articles below

This paper by Ziv is very good. It has oodles of references.

This guidance regarding training methods is helpful.

Susan Clothier's article on dominance is worth reading too.

Prefer books?



Check out John Bradshaw's book In Defence of dogs.. available from Word of Books and other retailers!

I hope you found this helpful. Reach out if you have any questions.

Lisa

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