



Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

A BALANCED RELATIONSHIP

When we have a dog as a pet it is important to consider not only our needs (companionship, affection, protection, etc.) but also the dog's needs. Last week we looked at the many ways dogs contribute to the relationship with humans. This week we look at how we can have a mutually beneficial relationship by providing for our dog's needs. Dogs need food, shelter, a safe environment, physical stimulation (exercise), adequate rest, mental stimulation (a job to do) and a sense of belonging to their human pack.

In modern times our dogs are completely dependant on us to provide their needs. In fact many people now use the term "guardian" rather than "owner", a term that perhaps better explains our role in the human/dog relationship.

Understanding dogs in their natural state helps us understand and meet our dog's needs. Dogs are social animals and normally live in packs. So when we get a dog we need to make him part of the family (one of the pack) - not stuck out in the back yard to be given attention only when it suits us. Some breeds that have been bred to work closely with humans and those that have been bred purely as companions especially need to feel part of the family - they are not suited to being isolated in the back yard away from their family. Some breeds that were bred to work in packs particularly enjoy the company of other dogs.

Our dog needs sufficient good quality food to maintain him in a healthy condition and we must provide proper veterinary care if our dog is injured or sick.

We need a securely fenced yard or enclosure to keep our dog safe. It is no longer acceptable (in fact it is illegal) to allow our dog to roam free – at risk of injury from vehicles, other dogs, irate neighbours etc.

Our dog needs sufficient daily exercise to maintain healthy muscle tone and to use up his surplus energy. For some of the high energy breeds this is a significant commitment on our part but is essential for our dog's wellbeing.

We also need to train our dog (to provide him with mental stimulation and to develop a communication system between him and us). These days there are many activities available that provide an outlet for our dogs' natural instincts and abilities and enrich their lives - agility, tracking, herding, retrieving trials, flyball, earth dog, lure coursing etc.

Our dog also needs his own space - his own private retreat he can go to when he needs to sleep or be on his own without interruption. This is perhaps even more important if there are small children in the family.

When we choose an appropriate dog for our needs and then provide for our dog's needs we have a mutually beneficial relationship – our dog is happy and obedient, a pleasure to own and we enjoy his company. How well do you meet your dog's needs?

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