



Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

TRAINING THE OLDER DOG

Q. We are thinking of giving a home to a middle aged dog. Is it possible to train an older dog?

A. Absolutely! Don't believe that old saying "You can't teach an old dog new tricks", it's just an old wives tale. Dogs are never too old to learn new behaviours.

The key to training (or retraining) an older dog is to make the experience worthwhile from the dog's point of view. Fortunately, modern methods of dog training that reward the dog for doing what we want make it much easier to do this. It is essential to avoid any form of punishment.

An older dog has probably drifted through life feeling that he has been doing a good job of being a dog. When we decide to train or retrain our middle aged dog, all of a sudden his cosy world may be turned upside down. Now he is being expected to do things he has never before been asked or expected to do! If we were to use punishment, our dog would end up confused and bewildered – behaviour that had been acceptable for years is no longer good enough. In these circumstances our dog is hardly likely to be keen about the changes in his life.

However, if we use motivation and rewards, we make training worthwhile from our dog's point of view. Now learning new behaviours becomes interesting and exciting with treats and rewards on offer for doing as we ask. Our dog becomes enthusiastic about these great new changes in his life and his quality of life improves.

If our older dog has well established undesirable behaviours, we can train new appropriate behaviours to take their place. For example, if our dog has a bad habit of jumping up on us as a greeting, we can now teach him to sit for attention instead. Other undesirable behaviours can be substituted with new appropriate behaviours. The daily walk, to use another example, can become a pleasure instead of a nightmare once we teach our dog to walk politely on lead.

As a result of his newly improved behaviour, we now have a much closer relationship with our dog and can enjoy his company more than previously. A dog that previously spent very little time with his family because of his lack of manners and poor behaviour can now become part of the family.

So forget the old wives tale about not being able to train old dogs. Remember we (both dogs and humans!) are never too old to learn – anything you can teach a puppy or young dog can be taught to an older dog. The oldest dog we have had come to training was 13 years old – he had a great time. I would love to see your older dog at our training classes.

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