

Expert Advice from the Trainer

How to Find the Right Dog Trainer for You

by Siobhan Reilly

Dog training is a largely unregulated industry, which means that anyone could print a business card and call himself or herself a trainer. Many schools around the country will award an official title after a short period of time, for a price. So even an official title isn't a guarantee.

Asking friends for a recommendation is a great way to start your search. Calling local veterinarians for a referral is another starting point; ask them who trained their dogs. When you get a few leads find out how long the trainers have been in business and whether they have a business license and insurance. They should have both if they are a legitimate company. Ask questions like: How long have you been training dogs professionally? Are you certified? Can you send me some references? What methods do you use? Where did you learn those techniques?

Ask for a resume. Then consider the trainer's experience with your particular problem. A military trainer may be fine for teaching your German Shepard protection work but likely has no experience housebreaking a Maltese.

Three main types of training are available; group classes, training lessons in your home and training done while your dog is boarded

with the trainer. Each type can be successful, depending on your needs. Look for a company that will discuss your goals and your situation before recommending a program. Consider how well each option will work for you. Be aware that companies that only offer one type will try to convince you that that type of training is the best.

A bad trainer is a potential waste of money and could even make your problems worse.

Watch out for guarantees, as it is considered unethical to guarantee the behavior of a live animal. It is reasonable to expect satisfaction with services rendered. Take note that many "guarantees" are verbal only and if written only guarantee that the trainer will show up. Proceed with caution, if you are asked to pay a full package fee up front

before working with your trainer. You are often locked into these agreements.

A bad trainer is a potential waste of money and could even make your problems worse. Finding the right trainer for you and your dog is an important decision. A good trainer will use effective, humane techniques and teach them to you patiently. Training should be fun for you and your dog. ■

