

## Parenting Your Dog

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Have you ever thought of your dog as your 4-legged child? Well, you're not alone. According to statistics compiled by Petfinder, nine in ten pet owners surveyed say they consider their pet a member of the family and 63% of dog owners said they give their pets presents at Christmas. January is national Dog Training month and with that, I thought it would be appropriate to speak on behalf of your dog.



Our pets are our family – there's no question about that. And just like your children, your dogs have their own needs too. They need structure. They need guidance. They need consistency. Education, understanding, patience, TLC, rules, boundaries... I could go on and on. Dogs need you to “parent” them, to guide them, to show them what's acceptable and what isn't. Unlike human children though, you can't talk through a problem with them and reason with them. You need to be proactive in their education and show them through body language and verbal markers, what is good and what isn't.

Like your children, dogs need schooling. They need proper education. Unlike children, dogs don't generalize knowledge well so they need YOU to go to school with them. You need to bring the knowledge home and continue their education through practice, consistency, and patience! Dogs also need socialization, especially when young. They need to learn how to appropriately interact with others. This doesn't mean that they should always be part of a free for all – they need your guidance in socialization, especially as they turn into adolescents and tend to make poor choices. Not only do they need the guidance to interact appropriately with their own kind but they need to learn proper interaction with humans too.

### **Here are some lessons that your dog is expected to learn:**

1. Humans don't want to be pummeled, hugged, or kissed to death. They have personal bubbles. At least get to know them first.
2. Self control will get you far in life. No human wants to go ice, snow, or pavement-skating without the proper equipment.
3. If a human does something you don't like, your feelings are okay. But don't bite them. It's not socially acceptable.
4. You don't need to love every other dog you meet, but you should learn to tolerate them, especially from a distance.

5. You don't need to get the last word in. Tell your human that someone's lurking outside or that you have a visitor but once you've gotten your message across, leave it be. Job well done, note the word *done*.

5. Those 2-legged fast moving, screeching, sometimes stinky sort-of-human-like creatures that often show up at home and get bigger by the day? The same rules apply to them that apply to the life-size humans. Except that you will need to learn to tolerate them sitting on you, stepping on you, riding you, and pulling your tail. I know, it's very unfair but until humans learn just how unfair it really is, you will be expected to just take it.

6. The jibber-jabber that you see coming from the human mouth? That's their version of barking. It's how they communicate. Listen up and learn what they want. I know it doesn't make much sense but give it a try.



7. If all else fails, show your belly.

As your dog's parent, are not expected to know how to teach these lessons. Just like most people aren't properly equipped to home-school, you probably aren't properly equipped to know the ins and outs of dog behavior, how to read it, how to properly teach it, or how to problem solve it. Don't be afraid to ask for help. And as a final piece of advice, do your research! You have a choice as to where to school your dog. Do you want your "child" getting a slap on the wrist for bad behavior or a gold star for good behavior? *Parent your dog.*