

Finding the Right Trainer

1. Look for trainers who use positive reinforcement for good behavior, rather than punishment for unacceptable behavior.
2. Observe an obedience class without your pet. Are the animals and people having a good time? If someone won't let you sit in on a class, don't enroll.
3. Don't allow trainers to work your dog unless they tell you beforehand exactly what they plan to do.
4. Don't be afraid to tell a trainer to stop if he/she is doing something to your dog you don't feel comfortable with.
5. If a trainer tells you to do something you don't feel good about, don't do it! Don't be intimidated, bullied or shamed into doing something that you believe is not in your dog's best interest.
6. Avoid a trainer who offers guarantees. That trainer is either ignoring or doesn't understand the complexity of animal behavior.
7. Avoid trainers who won't let you use a training collar other than a choke collar. Head collars are humane alternatives to choke and pinch collars.
8. Avoid trainers who object to using food as a training reward. Food is an acceptable positive reinforcement-training tool.
9. If you believe your dog has been subjected to cruel treatment by a trainer, get the names and telephone numbers of witnesses. Take your dog to the veterinarian immediately for a complete physical. Tell them that the results of the exam may be used as evidence in a court case so that they will document the procedures with that in mind.
10. If you witness cruelty, don't be afraid to file charges. Talk to your local humane officers or animal control officers about what you saw. They can help determine if abuse occurred and what next steps should be taken.

By Suzanne Hetts, PhD in Alpha Bits, June 1999