

10 Points to Responsible Dog Ownership

by Terena Thomas

Having a canine companion may be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life if you are prepared to work with your new best friend and follow some simple ownership guidelines. Your responsibilities start with your dog, but also cover the community, your neighborhood and your family. Choosing the right pooch for your family needs is a critical decision that should incorporate feedback from all family members. Take into consideration, mature size, activity level, grooming needs, working ability, trainability and environment. Following the ten points described below will allow you to live harmoniously with your dog.

1. Regular **veterinary checkups** are critical to the health and longevity of your dog. Dental cleanings, vaccinations, Titer's testing, routine physicals and parasite control are topics you should discuss with your vet. Rabies vaccines are mandatory in every county and must be administered by a licensed veterinarian.
2. **Grooming** your dog whether it be bathing, brushing, clipping or dipping is a necessity for EVERY dog regardless of hair or fur type. Trim their toe nails and clean out their ears monthly. Wash them at least quarterly (don't bathe more than weekly). Brush and check them regularly to check for disease infected ticks. Cut or brush out knots or mats while they're small. Clean your dog's bedding regularly and use cedar chips (watch out for cats) to deter tapeworm infected fleas.
3. You are what you eat also applies to your dog. Feeding a generic or poor quality brand of **kibble** is the equivalent of you eating fast-food for every meal. Research your dog's nutritional needs and read labels carefully; if you wouldn't eat it, maybe your dog shouldn't either. Many behavior problems can be remedied by nothing more than a gradual diet change. Clean **water** is also mandatory as dog's need it to stay hydrated to properly regulate their body temperature.
4. **Mental and physical stimulation** is also required for your dog to be happy. If you don't provide socialization, individual attention and appropriate playtime, they will find other ways to release tension, anxiety and energy- often as behavior problems such as chewing, digging, barking and jumping-up. Play games that encourage respect from your dog such as retrieve, hide and seek and find-it games. If you play your own creative way, then remember to play games that encourage your dog to think you're smarter, faster, stronger & more agile. **Exercise is critical** especially for younger animals (but not too much exercise) and may eliminate many behavioral problems.
5. Contain your dog whether it be via leash, long-line, fence, seat belt or cable. **Controlling your dog** from running at large will prevent many vet visits, neighborhood problems and training issues. Use a leash in public- it's required by law in most places, and even when it's not mandatory, you can control your animal much easier if unforeseen events occur. Seat belts or crates for vehicle travel could save your dog's life in the event of an accident. Prevention is key here!

6. **Don't allow your dog to infringe on the rights of others**, whether it be in your neighborhood, the dog park or in your home. This includes barking, running loose, acting out of control, mounting other dogs, being a bully or acting aggressively.
7. Your dog counts on you to keep him safe. This includes **identification** which may be tags attached to a buckle collar, tattoos or a microchip ID. Having a current photo on hand is also helpful in the event you need to make posters.
8. Understand that owning a dog is more than just having a security system. Canines are very social creatures and belong to a pack, or group of dogs; most dogs are not solitary animals and that necessitates a commitment in **time and care** on your part. You are your dog's pack now, and clearly understanding this will result in a much deeper and more meaningful experience with your dog. You can use his social nature as a reward or a punishment if you're knowledgeable enough, otherwise you may be inadvertently ostracizing him and causing distress.
9. **Pick up after your dog**. It's not a glamorous job, but owning a dog implies that you are responsible for cleaning up any waste your dog creates. Primarily this applies to feces, but dogs also mark territory and communicate through urine application. Leg lifters (male and female) are a nuisance to society, as they do damage to retail products, landscaping and even other animals including humans. Dog feces can be detrimental to you and your dog's wellbeing. Parasites like roundworms are transmitted by as little as smelling fecal matter. Picking up after your dog is just as important when on public lands (parks, National Forest, BLM) as it is when on private (your backyard, your neighbors yards)!
10. **Training** your dog is important so that he is accepted by society and appropriate when in the house and yard. Socializing with people, animals, movements, mechanical tools and motorized vehicles is the foundation upon which your relationship with your dog is created. That relationship is only strengthened with obedience training, as this allows you and your dog to speak the same language. Use techniques that don't use force and that allow the dog freedom to think on their own. Reward often for desirable behavior. The more you train your dog, the more intelligent he'll become while his demeanor will become confident and more controlled.

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Canine Country School, LLC
Terena Thomas (970) 524-8724
www.caninecountryschool.com