

How to Find a Good Dog Trainer ©

Provided by the CSPCA, Inc. Public Education Committee

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(Ideas collected from the Working-Pei group, and Dr. Jeff Vidt, CSPCA National Obedience Advisor; Paula Perry, CSPCA National Agility Chairman and Marilyn Vinson, CSPCA National Therapy Dog Chairman)

Welcome to the world of Chinese Shar-Pei. Whether you obtained your dog for companionship or for competitive events, all dogs benefit from some degree of formal training. No matter what age your dog is, there are training classes available to help you train your dog to be a good citizen as well as just a family pet. Many training facilities offer Puppy Kindergarten classes for puppies from 8 weeks to 5 months old. These classes are excellent for teaching basic commands such as sit, come, stay, and how to walk nicely on leash. Beginning obedience classes are great for dogs over 5 months old. They basically teach the same things as the puppy class, but usually include additional commands such as focusing their attention on you, and to look to you for direction. Anyone who takes the time to train their dog will find the time and money was well spent. These classes are as much about teaching the owner how to train the dog, as they are about teaching the dog how to respond to your commands.

If you would like to train your dog for some sort of competition, you have several choices. Obedience and agility require a dog to perform on command off leash. Rally is a new arena that you can train for. It is basic obedience, and the beginning level is all on leash. It is very popular right now. There are other choices as well, such as fly ball, herding, tracking, and conformation classes. Usually a dog that has completed the basic obedience classes should be able to pass a Canine Good Citizen (CGC) test. When your dog passes this test, you will receive a certificate stating that he/she is a good citizen. If you would like to do therapy work, your dog needs to pass a CGC test, and/or a test by a National Therapy Organization to get certified. Once you have your dog certified, you can begin making visits to nursing homes and hospitals.

As with anything else, there are good trainers, and some that are not so good. Our goal is to give you some ideas on how to go about selecting the right trainer for you and your dog. When you begin your search for a trainer, it is a good idea to observe some local obedience, rally or agility competitions. Your breeder should be able to help you find local shows and matches. Go and watch to see whose dog is well trained, and ask the owner where they train. Those doing obedience and agility with their dogs are usually pretty friendly, so do not hesitate to ask questions. Another good place to start looking for a trainer is at your local obedience and agility clubs. They generally have more experienced staff, and tend to host seminars, which keep them abreast of many new and different training techniques. We have provided a list of how to find those clubs at the end of the article. Go observe the classes before you sign up. When you go to observe classes, look for the student to instructor ratio, what type of training methods they use – (positive or negative reinforcement) – how they handle the class and whether or not you like the area they are training in. Watch to see if the dogs are up working, or if they are merely being lectured. Most people learn better by doing rather than listening. You want to see the dogs actively up and working. Watch to see if any dog is having a problem, and how the trainer helps the owner work through it. Ask the trainer what breeds they have trained and to what level they have trained their own dogs. Does the next class start immediately, or is there time between classes to ask the trainer questions? Good trainers need to be able to work with behavior problems as well as knowing how to teach a dog to do a specific task. You can always ask a trainer for references, and check those references to see what people have to say about them.

If you can find a trainer that has gotten titles on the more difficult "non obedience" dogs, you might have a trainer that can work with a Shar-Pei. Better yet, if you can find a trainer that has trained a Shar-Pei, they should have a better idea of what potential problems you might experience in your training process

Another excellent source when looking for a good training class is to inquire at the local specialty club in your area. Several specialty clubs have a list of recommended trainers in the area that have successfully worked with

Shar-Pei. You can find a list of the local clubs on the CSPCA website, at www.cspca.com. Click on the membership button. You can click on the Affiliated Clubs link to find the list of all Shar-Pei Clubs. As a last resort you can check your phone book for training facilities. Again be sure to observe some classes before you begin a training class to see if you might have a good fit with the trainer.

Anyone can call themselves a "trainer". Just because someone has put a couple of titles on their Lab or Golden, does not mean they are good at training all breeds. Some breeds are naturally easier to train, like Labs, Golden Retrievers, and Border Collies. Dogs learn in different ways, and there is no one method that works for all dogs. Good trainers need to have a large source of ideas, be able to switch gears, and try different methods on different dogs. A truly good trainer has a "toolbox" of different ideas and methods to pull from.

Basically you want to find a trainer that uses positive reinforcement, rather than relying solely on negative training methods. Positive reinforcement involves rewarding good behavior. Negative training involves a yank on the collar, using a harsh voice or withholding treats. There may be times that you will need to use both of these methods, but in general strictly harsh training techniques should be avoided. Overall the training should be positive. A dog with a positive outlook responds quicker and with a better attitude. This type of training gives the dog a positive outlook on what is being asked of him and makes for a better team (handler and dog). The dog should like the trainer and the trainer like the dog. This relationship is important and if there is mutual respect for each other the trainer will give more and the dog will give more. In our opinion, a trainer that uses strictly negative training methods is not an appropriate trainer, and you would risk preventing your dog from ever responding in a positive way. A word of caution about always rewarding your dog with food for good behavior: There may be times when you are out with your dog, and need a quick response from him/her. You do not want your dog so trained to food as a reward, that it won't listen if he knows you have no food with you. Once the dog is consistently performing a command, you need to wean them off of food by randomly reinforcing the behavior with food. That way they never know when they will get the food and will respond "just in case". However, even when you don't give them food, you should positively reward them in other ways, such as praise, a pat on the head, toys, etc.

Since Shar-Pei can be independent, negative training methods may be called for at times. You need to find a trainer that knows when and where to use which reinforcement, and can combine the two. Positive and negative reinforcement are needed together. Many new trainers don't want to use any negative training under any circumstances. There has to be a balance -- a "soft" dog may need a lot more positive and a "tough" dog may need more negative. Dog training is a continually evolving discipline and people should not be afraid to try different techniques to see what works for them and their dog. You will not ruin a dog trying a new technique occasionally. It actually keeps the dog interested in training by changing things up once and a while. Very often people that train their dogs for competition train with several different trainers to get new ideas.

The best way to train your dog is at a class where you have a trainer who will help fix any problems that might arise, however that is not always possible. Perhaps you live in an area that doesn't offer classes, or the classes are at an inconvenient time. Whatever the reason, there are books and video tapes that can help you train your dog. Some of our favorite resources are:

Association of Pet Dog Trainers: www.apdt.com Has a list of trainers in different areas of the country.

American Kennel Club: <http://www.akc.org/clubs/search/index.cfm> Allows you to find a club based on the type of training, services, and competition the club provides.

United Kennel Club: <http://www.ukcdogs.com> Has a list of conformation, obedience, and agility events in the various areas of the country.

www.cleanrun.com/agilityinfo/clubs/ Has a list of agility clubs and schools in different areas of the country.

www.takeabowwow.com/ Has videos to order for training. Also has ideas of how to train a dog to do some simple tricks.

www.puppyworks.com Click on the video's button, and then you can click on the videos or books to get a list

of training resources. Especially look at the books and videos by Ian Dunbar, who is a world renowned dog trainer.

www.drjwv.com - Click on the articles button, and then click on training. He has articles specifically about training Chinese Shar-Pei.

www.clickersolutions.com/reviews/clickforjoy.htm

Click for Joy by Melissa Alexander - A book with clear and accurate answers for over one hundred commonly asked questions about clicker training in one essential reference.

Helpful yahoo groups that you can join:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/workingpei> - This site is for owners of Chinese Shar-Pei who 'work with' their Shar-Pei in obedience, therapy, agility, flyball, herding, service dog work of all kinds, and Canine Good Citizen, just to name a few areas of 'working pei'.

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/positivepetzine/ - This is an e-mail magazine that you can join to learn how to correct behavior problems.

http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Aidan_Bindoff - has all kinds of interesting articles on how to fix common behavior problems.

Regardless of whether you would like to train your dog simply as a companion with better manners, or you would like to train for competition events, all dogs and owners benefit from training their dogs. Trained dogs make better members of the family and society they live in. We think you will be well rewarded for any time or money spent in training and socializing your dog. We trust that we have given you some good ideas on how to find an appropriate trainer. If you have investigated all the ideas and resources that we have presented and still need help, the CSPCA has designated Chairmen for Obedience & Rally, Agility, and Therapy Dogs. Please go to www.cspca.com and put your cursor on the CSPCA- Club Info button. A button will come up that says Committees. Scroll down the list until you find the committee you are interested in and the contact information will be provided on that page.