

Humane Society of Elmore County News – 13 Jan '25  
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January is One Health Awareness Month as well as National Train Your Dog & Walk Your Pet Month. Since us humans tend to focus on health and fitness in January, then no better time to do the same for our pets.

An inordinate number of dogs are surrendered to our Shelters because they are “too active.” In most cases their breed types ARE active breeds who simply need more exercise than they are getting. Probably 75% of these dogs have also never been taught to walk decently on a leash, so any walk is simply no fun for either their human or the dog. This then results in NO walks and an increasingly frustrated dog and exasperated owner. So starting of this New Year by doing some simple leash training and adding your dog into your new exercise program will be good for you and good for your dog! With just a little work your dog can happily be your walking/hiking/jogging partner so you can both get in shape together. Bottom line - a tired dog is a more well-mannered dog, so it is a win-win for both of you.

Teaching your dog to walk or run with you on a leash, to not jump and just to have basic nice manners is not rocket science but it does take a commitment to training and consistency. Local trainers can help with the basics of leash training and general manners if you find you need help. Our dogs love making us happy so think ‘reward’ for when they do what you want as they will quickly figure out what makes you happy. Some dogs are motivated by treats (use a treat they do not get at any other time and small so they don’t stop to chew), others are motivated by toys, and others just by your praise. Dogs understand clear, concise commands and most owners simply talk too much so the dog is confused and has no idea what is being asked of it. This is why a professional trainer can take your dog from you and in five minutes likely have it responding to commands. A good trainer knows how to clearly communicate with your dog. For your dog it is an “OH, THAT is what you want me to do” moment. In reality – training a dog is about 75% training the owner in how to effectively communicate with their own pet.

Of course, our dogs are as different as we are so some pick up on lessons quickly while others take a bit longer. Knowing your dog’s attention span is very important as one dog may work great for 15 minutes before losing interest and for another 5 minutes is all they can give you before they simply tune out. Some are quicker on the uptake than others and knowing what really makes your dog tick also makes a big difference. Does your dog respond to treats? Or toys? Or clicks or whistles? Every dog is different so finding what gets their undivided attention can greatly improve the chance of training success.

One caution – some folks think they can send their dog ‘off’ to a trainer and they will come back and be the perfect dog – NOT. Remember – you, the owner, are a HUGE part of the training process and you have to also learn how to communicate what you want so your dog will understand. You can send a dog to a trainer but part of that will also be YOU spending time with your dog AND the trainer so the dog trainer can train YOU, the owner. Training of any kind takes patience and perseverance on everyone’s part, and it never really ends. Refresher training should take place throughout your dog’s life – for both of you! A professional tennis player isn’t successful only playing tennis during tournaments – they practice, and get coaches, and research and practice more – true success entails dedication!

So get out those comfy walking or running shoes, teach your dog first how to walk nicely on a leash, and start out 2025 with daily nice long walks/runs with your dog – the reward will be a tired and better behaved dog, and perhaps a more fit & more relaxed YOU as well!