



Congrats! You just adopted a dog or perhaps you've got a dog with some serious behavior issues. There are many people out there calling themselves trainers, so how do you find the most qualified professional for your situation?

### **Credibility**

Lawyers have to pass the Bar Exam to practice their trade. Unfortunately, there is no nationally recognized certification for dog trainers. However, the closest thing to a Dog Trainer's Bar Exam is the Certification Counsel for Pet Dog Trainers (CPDT). CPDT Trainers have demonstrated their ability by logging over 300 hours in the field, have taught group classes using positive methods and have to have three letters of recommendation before they are even eligible to take the CPDT Exam.

Tips: In general, ask your perspective trainer if they are a CPDT, and if not, what experience makes them qualified to be a dog trainer?

If you've got serious behavioral issues, a trainer may not be the person to call, look for a professional offering Behavior Counseling or Behavior Problem Solving, and of course, for issues that may require the utmost expertise- like dog-human aggression, the best bet may be to see a Practicing Animal Behaviorist.

### **Methodology**

Training should be fun for the dog and guardian! A skilled professional uses only the most modern, humane methods including positive, reward based training; in fact, a trainer should never make you use any method that you're not comfortable with.

As far as equipment for training, trainers using positive methods will allow the use of head and body harnesses and the regular ole' leash and collar, but will not allow choke, prong or shock collars as part of training.

Tips: Ask if you can observe a class to get a sense of the methods used and see for yourself if people are having a good time.

### **Teaching Skills**

According to the Association of Pet Dog Trainers website ([www.apdt.com](http://www.apdt.com)), a skilled trainer will:

- 1 "Provide a clear explanation of each lesson.
- 2 Demonstrate the behavior(s) that students will be teaching to their dogs.
- 3 Provide clear instructions and written handouts on how to teach the behavior(s).
- 4 Give students ample time in class to begin practicing the day's lesson.
- 5 Assist students individually with proper implementation of techniques."

Also, a skilled trainer will welcome questions and make sure that it's a safe environment to ask!

Tip: If possible, observe your trainer interacting with clients.

### **Classes, Privates, Board and Train...oh my!**

So, now that you know what to look for to select a trainer. What training package is best for you?

Group classes are highly recommended for anyone with a young pup or for anyone that has not taken a class, but is looking to work on the basics with distraction. It's crucial for puppies to meet other puppies, and a class will help provide that social need. Classes are appropriate for dog and people friendly dogs.

Private lessons are great for people that want one on one training for anything- basic obedience or specific behavior problems- leash walking, attention, housetraining, etc. Private training can help get you on the right course quickly and are especially recommended for dogs that are reactive or aggressive.

Board and Train packages are designed for a trainer to take your dog for 1-4 weeks and work with them and then turn them back over to you. In theory, this works, and can be very helpful for basic obedience, but is not likely the answer for un-housetrained, anxious or aggressive dogs. What is helpful about Board and Train programs is that your dog will be trained to cues that you can then use, but beware, you're not off the hook. The progress can easily be undone if you think your dog is "fixed" and don't continue with daily training. Remember, a professional trainer is highly skilled at training your dog to be responsive to *them*, so it's a must that you're on board to comply and implement what your trainer recommends for lasting success.

Whichever you choose, enjoy training your dog! And using positive methods can make a lifetime of difference!

Leigh Siegfried a Certified Pet Dog Trainer and Owner of Opportunity Barks Behavior & Training, offering private lessons, behavior consultations, group classes and workshops in Greater Philly Metro area, with training locations in Philadelphia and Quakertown, PA. Have a training question or want more information? Visit [www.opbarks.com](http://www.opbarks.com) or call 888-OPBARKS.