



A vet's top tips for training your dog

RSPCA 
Pet Insurance

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Pet training introduction



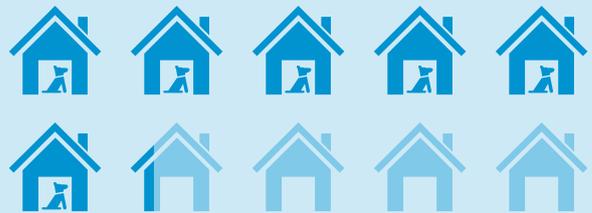
Dogs are our best friends, according to the popular saying, and once a furry friend joins the family you'll soon agree. They're not only cute, but provide companionship, a reason to become more active and will entertain you for hours with their antics.

It may seem impossible to take on another responsibility when you're already juggling work, family and more, but a little effort will certainly pay off for years to come.

Here, we provide a vet's top tips to effectively train your dog – so you can experience the joys of pet ownership *without* the stress.

Australians love dogs

Australia has one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world, with **62%** of households having a pet



24 million
furry friends across the country

Dogs top our list of favourite pets: **38%** of Australian households have a dog.¹



1. [How many pets are there in Australia?](#) – RSPCA

Toilet training

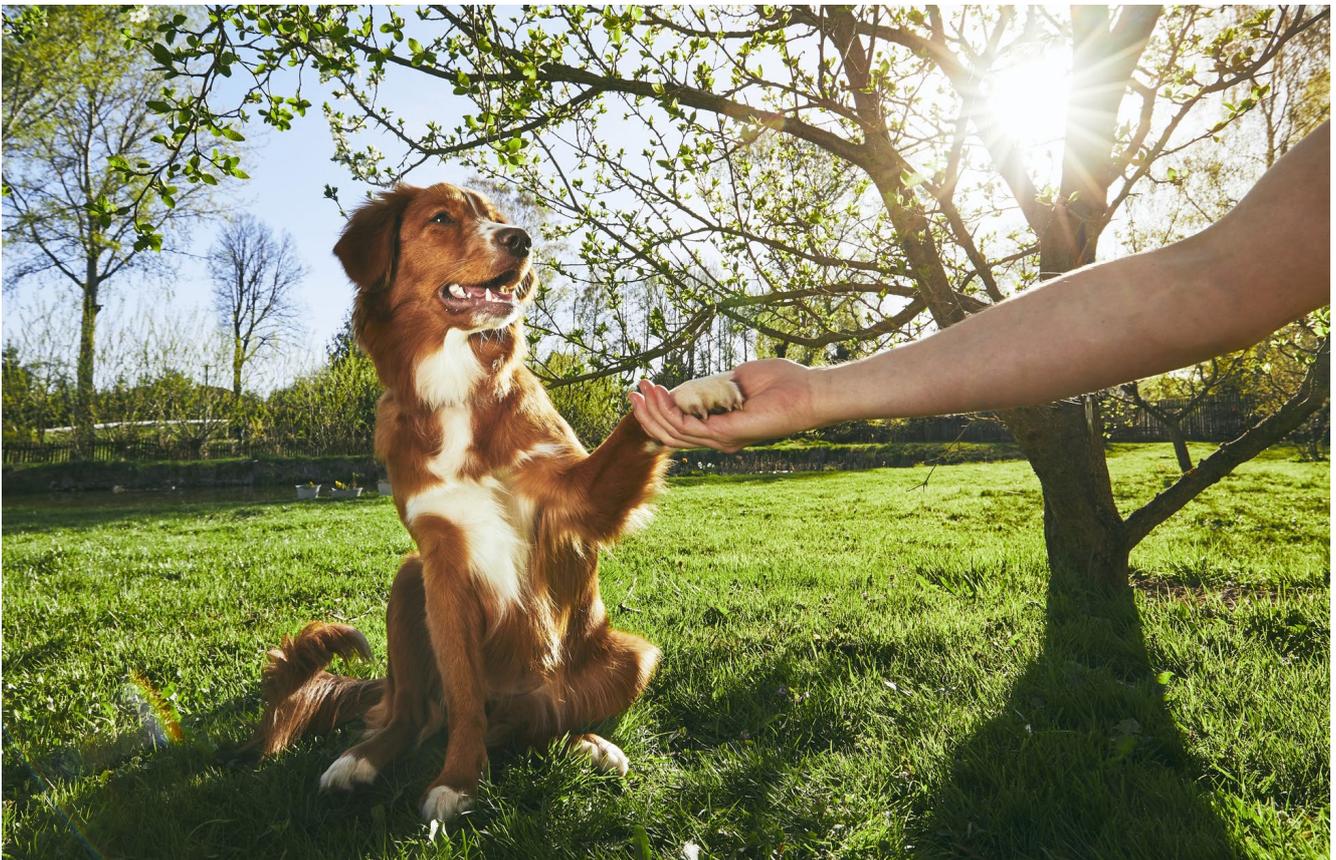
For those who've toilet trained a child, the task of toilet training a puppy may be one that's met with a little apprehension. But think of it this way – you're experienced.

Just like toilet training children, you'll need a little patience when training your dog, and every puppy will learn at its own pace. Also keep in mind that very young puppies may not be able to avoid little accidents.

Rewards-based training works best. Forget the old idea of rubbing your dog's nose in it if they go to the toilet in the wrong place. Never shout at them or punish them when they do not do what you want. Instead simply ignore this behaviour and clean up the mess straight away with a non-ammonia-based cleaning product. Cleaning up is important as an area that smells like a toilet will continue to be used as one.

Positive reinforcement is a two-step process:

- 1** Give your dog plenty of opportunities to go to the toilet outside in the allocated spot. Dogs will often need to go to the toilet after sleeping, eating or playing, and may sniff and look around beforehand. These are your cues to get them to their toilet spot pronto.
- 2** When your dog goes to the toilet in the right spot, reward them straight away with a pat, a "good dog" praise, a food treat or some time with their favourite chew toy.



Basic commands: Sit and wait

Teaching your dog some basic commands will make life easier for everyone.

1. Sit

Sit is a great all-round command, and can be used in situations like before your dog eats or is put on a lead.

To teach your dog to sit, put some food in your hand and place your hand near the tip of the dog's nose. Move your hand up and over, towards the back of the dog's head. Your dog should naturally put its bottom down and sit. When it does, give it the food.

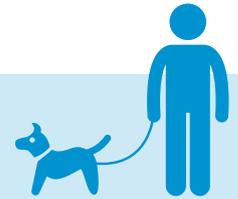
Once your dog is getting the hang of things, start saying "sit" as you're using the food lure. Gradually, the dog will understand "sit" and you won't need to use food as a lure.

2. Wait

Now that your dog will sit on command, it's handy to teach him or her to stay sitting for a short period. Sit your dog in front of a food bowl and keep him or her back from the bowl by holding at the collar.

Next, make a clear signal, such as holding up your palm and saying "wait". Take a biscuit from the food bowl and hand feed your dog if it remains sitting. Repeat this a few times and then break the wait by saying "okay" and pointing to the bowl. This way your dog will understand it's time to start moving when you say "okay".

Guidelines for training puppies



Start training in a quiet environment as puppies are easily distracted.



Aim for at least 15 minutes of training every day.



Always remain patient.



Start with toilet training and basic commands such as sit and stay.



You can use a favourite toy in addition to treats while training – don't overfeed when using food as a treat.

Walking



Walking on a loose lead

One of the best things about owning a dog is getting into the habit of daily walking. When it's time for your dog to venture out into the wider world, start with loose-lead training. Walking your dog on a loose lead means your dog can enjoy the walk and you can too since you won't be dragged down the road by your arm or trying to untangle yourself from the lead.

All you need is a collar, a lead and a few doggie treats to get started. With the lead in your right hand and treats in your left hand, start walking. As soon as your dog pulls out in front of you, stop and change direction. Reward your dog with a treat for behaving well on the loose lead and avoid the temptation to pull on the lead in frustration if they do not do what you want.

Walking off-leash and recall

If you have an off-leash dog walking area near you, your dog will love the opportunity to run and sniff the new surrounds. However, it's important that your dog returns to you when called.

Don't leave it until you're out in a park and your dog is sniffing something interesting to start this lesson. Instead, start calling "come" to your dog when you know they will actually come, such as when you're about to feed them or when you return home after being out. When you say "come" also open your arms up and reward them with a pat or a treat when they do come.

Once you've repeated this learning, start using the command in your own backyard and then while your dog is still on a long lead when you're out. Once you get consistent results, try using the command in a safe off-leash area.

No more jumping up

Dogs love to jump up on people. It's often their way of saying hello. If you push them away, they can think this is a game (a fun game they won't tire of easily!). As puppies, jumping up often earns them a pat, which can reinforce this behaviour – and it won't be so welcome once they've grown larger.

To put an end to jumping up, simply ignore the behaviour, turning your back to the dog. If you've taught your dog the sit command, you can use that if they come around for another attempt at jumping up.

Don't be tempted to say "no" when they jump up and don't forget to reward them with praise if they stop jumping and sit.

All the methods recommended here involve **reward-based training**. It's the most effective and humane type of training for dogs and is recommended by the RSPCA.

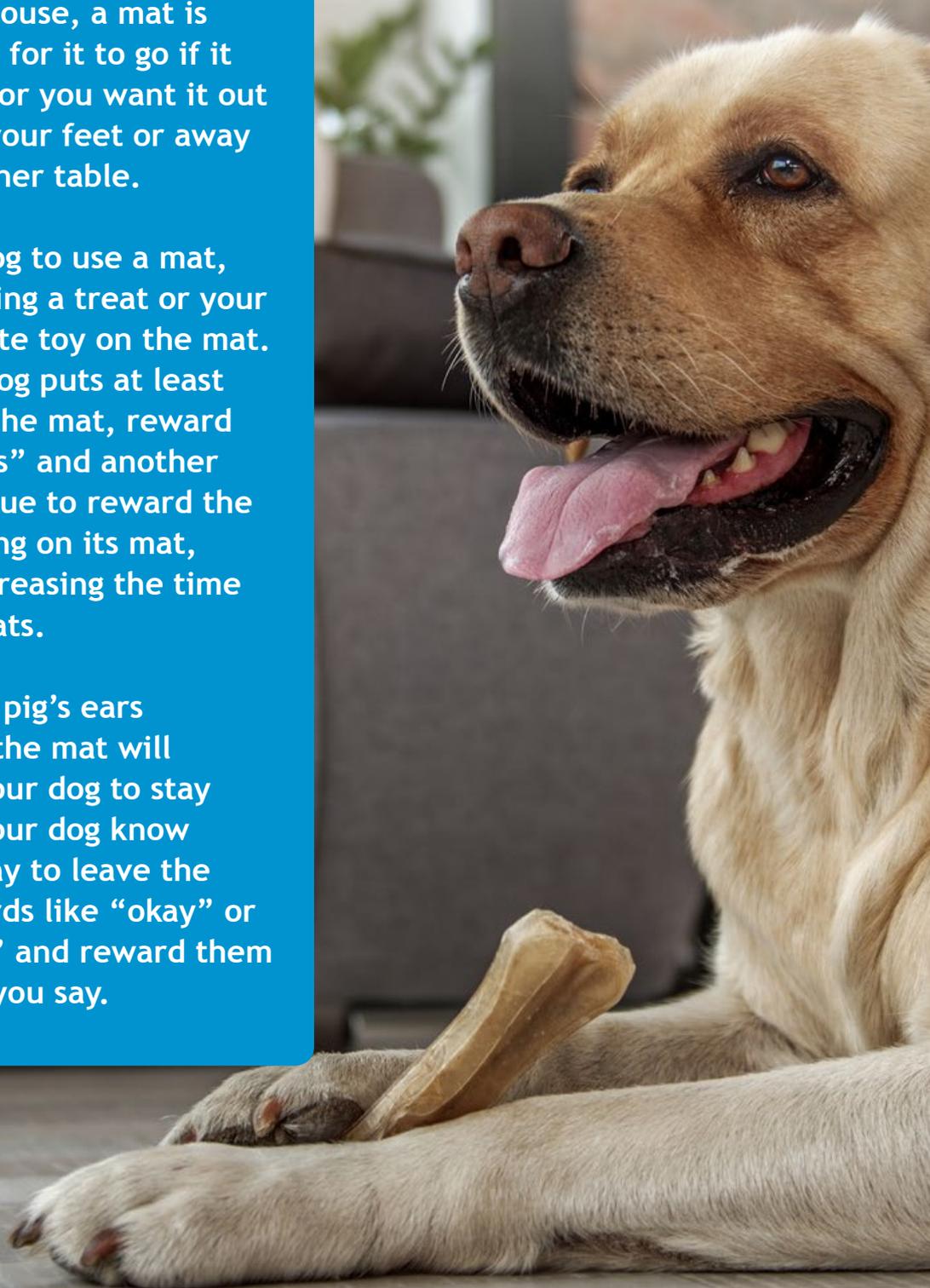


Mat training

If your dog is going to spend time in the house, a mat is a great place for it to go if it wants a rest or you want it out from under your feet or away from the dinner table.

To teach a dog to use a mat, start by putting a treat or your dog's favourite toy on the mat. When your dog puts at least one paw on the mat, reward it with a "yes" and another treat. Continue to reward the dog for staying on its mat, gradually increasing the time between treats.

Using Kongs, pig's ears or bones on the mat will encourage your dog to stay put. To let your dog know when it's okay to leave the mat, use words like "okay" or "off you get" and reward them for doing as you say.



Encouraging appropriate chewing

Dogs have many reasons to chew. They chew when teething, playing, scavenging for food, to self-soothe and to keep their teeth and gums healthy. It becomes a problem, though, when they start chewing your good furniture or shoes.

There are a few tactics you can use to encourage more appropriate chewing:

- Set up a pen so they can't access the area where they are chewing on inappropriate items, or supervise the dog.
- Give your dog appropriate toys that can be chewed and reward him or her for chewing on these toys.
- Experiment with toys that have different textures and tastes to find what your dog likes best.
- Coat toys in peanut butter to make them even more attractive chewing objects. (Check with your vet first as some dogs with specific health problems may not be able to have peanut butter).



Riding in the car

Once you've toilet trained your dog and they can follow basic commands, taking them in the car should be a lot easier and safer. Consider these precautions to ensure a safe journey for everyone:

- Restrain your dog using a car harness that has been independently tested and marked safe. It's a simple process, with most attaching straight to the seatbelt. Alternatively, a pet carrier can keep your dog secure during the trip. Just be sure it has been independently tested and approved as well.
- Restrain your dog in the back seat or rear of the vehicle (the passenger seat airbag could cause injury or death in the event of an accident).
- Don't leave your dog in the car – they can succumb to heat stress very quickly.
- During a longer trip, stop for toilet breaks and on-lead exercise.

Many of the tips in this guide can be incorporated in your day-to-day routine. By putting in the effort to do things right now, you'll save yourself the stress and time investment of correcting problem behaviours down the track.

Pet insurance is one way to save yourself more stress by protecting against your dog's health expenses.

Get a free quote for insurance with RSPCA Pet Insurance now.

