



BARK BUSTERS' TOP 10 TIPS EVERY DOG OWNER SHOULD KNOW

As part of Bark Busters' commitment to responsible dog ownership, Bark Busters Dog Behaviour Therapists have compiled a Top 10 list that will help dog owners better understand their canine friends.

Suggestions to Promote Better Understanding of Man's Best Friend, Encouraging More Responsible, Enjoyable Pet Ownership

1) A dog is a dog. The greatest misconception many dog owners have is to assume their dogs communicate the way people do. Dogs instinctively follow the same rules and exhibit many of the same behaviour patterns as their wild ancestors. To effectively train your dog, you must first understand his instinctual and natural behaviour.

2) Many dogs think in terms of survival. Dogs instinctively know that living with others, under the leadership of an assertive pack member, increases their chances for survival. As a dog owner, one of your responsibilities is to model a leader's strong and consistent characteristics so that you will be accepted as the leader and your dog will learn to respect and obey you. Your leadership will help your dog feel safe and eliminate many behaviour problems.

3) Dogs don't understand English. In addition to barking, growling and other guttural sounds, dogs rely heavily on body language. And yet, your body language can easily be misinterpreted. By understanding how dogs communicate, you will avoid the mistake of telling your dog one thing while your body language and voice tone tell him something completely different. (Learn more about body language and voice tones at BarkBusters.co.uk)

4) Dogs are neither spiteful nor deliberately naughty. There are three reasons why a dog misbehaves or disobeys: 1) He does not understand what you want, 2) He does not consider you his leader, or 3) He is suffering from some kind of stress or fear. Understanding this will help you address your dog's problems and behaviours.

5) Aggression is instinctual in every breed. Whether Chihuahua or German shepherd, a dog's breed has nothing to do with aggression. Instead, aggression is instinctual and caused most often by fear of the unknown—that is, whatever the dog cannot understand or does not recognise as normal. When a dog becomes frightened, he will do one of two things: fight or take flight. By reinforcing leadership with your dog, you can avoid unacceptable or uncontrollable aggression.

6) You can teach an old dog new tricks. Dogs are continuous learners and have good memories. The three things that primarily influence a dog's behaviour are association, experience and instinct. By conditioning your dog and effectively showing him what you consider good and bad behaviour you can help him change his behaviour.

7) Bad behaviours may be natural, but they do not have to be normal. Most people consider digging, chewing and jumping as unacceptable dog behaviour—but to dogs, these actions are natural. As our dog's primary educator and leader, it is our job to teach him that what he considers natural behaviours are not necessarily acceptable in our households.

8) It's illogical to get angry with your dog. Dogs do only what comes naturally or what they've learned through association, so getting angry—or using physical force—is both inappropriate and counterproductive. Moreover, never use your hands for disciplining, because dogs find this provocative and threatening. Use your hands as little as possible when training—and when you do, make sure your dog always associates your hands with gentleness, praise and pleasure.

9) Correct your dog on the spot. Because dogs learn from association, they will comprehend your message only if it is delivered in a timely manner. A correction must be issued at the precise moment the dog is either contemplating or actually doing something wrong. Because it can be difficult to catch your dog in the act, find ways to simulate situations in which your dog would normally misbehave so you can then correct him immediately and guide him to the appropriate behaviour, while praising his correct decisions.

10) Dogs experience the world differently than humans. With 25 times more olfactory receptors than humans, dogs can sense odors at concentrations millions of times lower than we can. In addition, a dog's eyesight has been described to be like that of a person who is color-blind. Dogs use other cues (such as smell, texture, brightness, and position) rather than relying on colour. With acutely developed hearing, dogs can hear sounds four times farther away than humans—but dogs also hear selectively. They can sleep beside a blaring television, but wake up as soon as they hear something unrelated to that.

