

## DOG LIFE

# Rehabilitation for an aggressive dog?

■ BY HARRY KALAJIAN

There are many types of rehabilitation, some of which you can attain with high success and others not so well, depending on the issues involved. When is rehabilitation needed? That all depends. Sometimes only obedience training is needed, and at other times a more elaborate rehabilitation program will be needed to resolve behavioral problems. Obedience training usually corrects 85 percent of behavioral issues. If the problem is aggression, then rehabilitation is the way to go.

Prior to the rehabilitation of any issues, you must look at the age, sex and breed of your dog. Is it a young dog or an older dog? Was the dog adopted at an older age, or was it bought as a young pup? If it's an older dog, was the issue man-made, or was it evident right after birth but never handled through proper obedience training? The sex, breed and the dog's living environment also can have an impact on the effectiveness of the rehab program.

If an older dog that has been adopted shows aggression toward kids or adults, rehabilitation probably won't be successful. The reason is that we will never know the dog's history and what it has gone through. Rehabilitation is usually done in a controlled environment, in which the same people are interacting with and desensitizing the dog. After a while the dog doesn't show aggressive behavior. However, when it is taken out of the controlled environment it may be okay with one or two or three people and then lash out at the fourth person. We



call this kind of dog a ticking time bomb. Today, tomorrow or next week it may revert to its aggressive behavior.

If you have an adult dog that is reactive and shows full-blown aggression, chances are you won't be able to cure it. You can modify it at times to have more control, but that's how far you will go. These dogs almost certainly have had a bad experience in the past, and unfortunately that is the result of it.

If your dog is young and aggressive, your course of rehabilitation will have a higher chance of success. But it is important that you as the owner follow the outlines given to you by the trainer. You have to always be on top of everything.

If a trainer guarantees that he (or she) can cure an older dog that is aggressive toward other dogs or

kids, ask him if he's willing to bring a strange dog or two to meet your dog in an uncontrolled environment, or if he would bring his daughter or niece to interact with the dog at hand. Nope, he wouldn't.

I'm not saying it can't be done, because for each case it's different. If the right amount of time were designated and worked on religiously, maybe there'd be a chance. But it would be a rare owner who would be willing to designate that much time – months and months – with the training facility charging for months and months of work and no guarantee of success.

If you have a puppy and you notice it's exhibiting certain traits that can eventually turn to aggression, you must not wait to go and see a professional trainer. Some things puppies do that look cute could proceed to their becoming possessive and eventually turning bad. Seek a professional trainer from the start.

Patience, persistence, consistency and repetition will be your key to success. As I always say, "Failure is not an option" if you are willing to put in the time and effort. Have a woof woof of a month.

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