

## **Living with an English Shepherd**

For generations the English Shepherd has been bred to be a general all-purpose farm dog. This has created an intelligent and strong willed companion quite capable of thinking for itself. A working English Shepherd often has to figure out on its own what is needed. Their overriding goal is to please their human co-worker who may be elsewhere on the farm unable to provide guidance. Because of this, English Shepherds are very willing and eager to please, but most are quickly bored by repetition and often rebel at physical force. They do what is asked because they want to please their humans and not because they are made to do it.

Many training classes and manuals focus on forcful dominance and repetition, which may work well for some dogs but is often counter-productive for English Shepherds. They may put on the brakes and refuse to do anything, leaving both human and dog frustrated and out-of-sorts. English Shepherds make better partners than servants and, as a one time president of the English Shepherd Club said, English Shepherds really bloom when they feel that you are confidently relying on them.

The best way to train a dog, any dog, is through positive reinforcement. With some breeds, like English Shepherds, this may be the only way to go. When your dog does something you like, immediately do something your dog likes! Many English Shepherd owners have found "Clicker Training" to be a great way to do positive reinforcement, but reinforcement is anything your dog likes: food, petting, tones of voice, certain words, facial expressions, playing with a certain toy, access to the outdoors, access to the person or persons the dog loves. These are just a few of the possible reinforcers which determine most of your dog's behavior.

And speaking of determining your dog's behavior - time out for a small reminder. Dogs aren't people. They like people food, they like people beds, they like people - but they aren't people and they do not think like people. Even the very smartest dog in the world still thinks like a dog. You and your dog will be happiest if the dog is part of the family but your dog will still be a dog. Your dog will never be able to think like a person or even really understand how people think. But humans can often understand how dogs think and it's this information that will help you determine your dog's behavior.

One of the first and most important things you can teach your dog is "sit". When you tell your dog to sit and it does, you are reinforcing for both of you that you, the human, are in control. Plus, a dog that is sitting can't also be jumping up on Aunt Sally. A dog that is busy sitting can't be running off down the road after the mailman. A sitting dog won't be starting fights with strange dogs or biting children or stealing food off the picnic table.

When you teach your dog to sit you are starting on the road to making your dog accept you as leader of the pack. Some dogs have no desire to be the leader, or Alpha, dog but even those dogs will be much happier having it firmly established

just who is Alpha. And for those dominant dogs who think they should be in control, "sit" is a good place to start changing their minds.

Here is a short list of other things you can use to establish your Alpha status:

- **YOU are the provider of food.** Food does not materialize every time your dog begs for it. It does not leap from your plate during dinner. And sometimes it disappears right when your dog thought it was a sure thing. Certainly it never appears at any time at all without your dog having earned it, at least by sitting.
- **YOU get the sofa. And the bed.** You can even sleep in the dog bed if you want to. You can go anywhere and do anything. Your dog, however, is only allowed up when you invite it (or when you aren't around).
- **YOU get to go first.** In the door, out the door, into a room - you, the human, get to go first and the dog waits. Many dogs are especially eager to go outside, so a leash and a firm "sit" may be necessary to enforce this one at first.
- **YOU decide when it is time to play.** Even if you think your dog is right and it really is time you turned off the computer and went for a walk don't let your dog know that. Tell your dog to "sit" and then log off or finish the chapter you're reading or the dishes or whatever you were doing. Then go for that walk.

And with an English Shepherd that walk is very important. English Shepherds need lots of exercise. They need to be with their humans. They need mental challenges. Every walk is an adventure and a chance to learn new things. Formal obedience classes are wonderful things but nothing takes the place of daily walks. Praise your dog for being good, give your dog treats, make those walks an opportunity for you to reinforce all the things you like best in your dog. The more time you spend with your dog the more things you will find to like.

**Authority without domination**

**Love without subservience**

**Respect without fear**