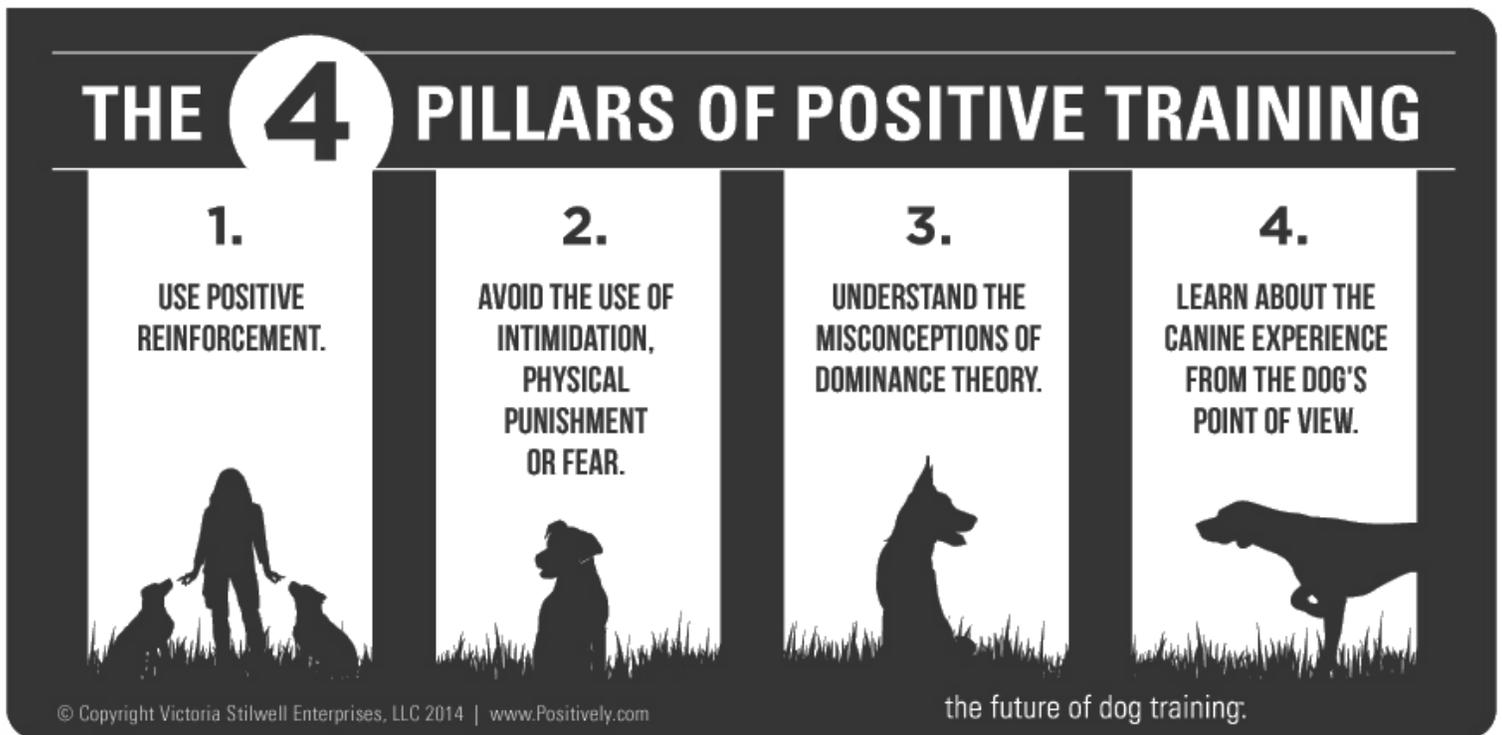


# How to Choose a Positive Trainer



## Questions To Ask Dog Trainers Before Hiring:

- **"How do you correct behavior?"** The type of answer a dog trainer gives to this question can tell you a huge amount about what kind of trainer they are. If the answer involves physical punishment of any kind, you can cross that trainer off your list. What you're looking for here is a description of techniques which interrupt the behavior without force or intimidation followed by an immediate redirection of the dog onto other more positive things.
- **"Can I speak to your past and current clients?"** Any trainer who resists letting you talk to past and current references has something to hide and should not be trusted. Be sure to take the references with the appropriate grain of salt, but if you hear even one previous client say the trainer helped them become a better 'pack leader' and show 'dominance' over the dog, avoid that trainer at all costs.
- **"Do you have liability insurance?"** All good trainers should carry insurance.
- **"Are you a dog whisperer?"** The answer given here will also tell you an awful lot about the type of trainer you're dealing with. The term 'dog whisperer' has become a hot-button issue in the dog training world, and while there is nothing wrong with the term in general, it has unfortunately become synonymous with certain dominance and punishment-based techniques which are correctly avoided by good positive trainers.
- **"How might medical issues affect my dog's behavior?"** Good dog trainers want to work in harmony with solid veterinary care to first rule out any potential medical issues when identifying the root causes of any unwanted behavior. If the trainer discounts the importance of the veterinary component of dog behavior, you should avoid that trainer.
- **"Might my food be affecting my dog's behavior?"** The simple answer to this question should be "yes", so any trainer who discounts the importance of nutrition on behavior should be avoided.
- **"Do you use rewards in training, and if so, what kind?"** This is sort of a trick question (on purpose). Some old-school trainers are vehemently against positive training and can't help but reveal their ignorance when asked about rewards in training. Such a response should be all you need to hear. But if the response is more nuanced, saying that the trainer does use some rewards but not food, that's another area for concern. Food is very powerful in changing a dog's brain chemistry, and anyone who rules out the use of food in training is not using up-to-date information. The answer you're looking for is that yes, rewards are crucial in training, and that they like to use whatever reward motivates that particular dog the most (food, praise, play, toys, etc).

## Positive trainers worth trusting with your dog's well-being will most likely:

- **Have good people skills.** It is imperative that any good trainer be a great communicator both in terms of listening to your questions and concerns as well teaching you and your dog. They should be very easy to understand and able to pace their teaching style to whatever speed you need in order to produce positive change.
- **Be a great listener.** This is crucial. You can usually tell during your first contact with a trainer – via email, phone or in person – whether he or she is willing to take the time to hear what you have to say. If you're not able to communicate effectively with the trainer, the process will be infinitely more challenging from the start.
- **Use positive methods to address negative behaviors.** Anyone can teach a dog to sit, stay or come using positive reinforcement, but it takes a lot more skill, experience and confidence in positive training techniques to modify unwanted negative behaviors like aggression or separation anxiety using positive training. This is a key identifier which separates hybrid trainers (that use both positive and punishment techniques) from truly great positive trainers.
- **Take a full behavioral history of your dog.** Good trainers want to know everything possible about a dog's background so that they can more quickly and effectively identify root causes and implement a positive training protocol. Any trainer that discounts the importance of a dog's history should be avoided.
- **Provide client references.** In fact, a good trainer will usually actively want you to talk to his or her previous clients. This is because there are so many bad trainers working professionally, it is even more important for the good trainers to convince you that they are in fact solid positive trainers. While it's good to talk to references from the trainer's list, he or she should also encourage you to find and talk to previous clients on your own. Good trainers have nothing to hide.
- **Want to train the entire household.** Consistency is a key to effective positive training, so good trainers will usually strongly suggest that if at all possible the entire household be available for at least the early training sessions. Doing so ensures that everyone who interacts with the dog will be using a common language and providing a consistent learning experience for the dog(s).
- **Have liability insurance.** This is a business term, but an important thing to confirm before hiring a trainer. Not only does it suggest a higher level of professionalism and legitimacy, it also protects you and the trainer in case anything goes wrong with the dog.
- **Include you in the training.** During the training process, a good trainer will constantly and effectively communicate what he or she is doing, and one of their primary goals will be for you to step in and eventually take over the actual training with your dog.

### SCIENCE AND COMMON SENSE SAY TO GO POSITIVE

Modern behavioral science has proven that dominance and punishment-based techniques employed by traditional 'old-school' dog trainers are less effective and more dangerous than science-based positive training. Our inner moral compasses, meanwhile, tell us that compulsion training just doesn't 'feel right' compared to positive reinforcement, especially when you begin to understand that positive methods actually work better anyway.  
~Victoria Stilwell; positively.com

## Positive Trainers in the Durham Area:

### Cheery Dogs

Jane Marshall  
cheerydogs.com  
(919) 929-9115

### Yay Dog!

Clare Reece-Glore  
yaydog.com  
(919) 724-7090

### Robin Karas

wagnroll@nc.rr.com  
(919) 225-923

### Paw In Hand Dog Training

Barbara Long  
www.pawinhanddogtraining.com  
(919) 923-5607

### Green Beagle Lodge

Ryan Ford & Angela CUrry  
[www.greenbeaglelodge.com/  
training-2](http://www.greenbeaglelodge.com/training-2)  
(919) 929-7387

### The Confident Dog

Patricia Tirrell  
www.confident-  
dog.com  
(919) 824-1624

### Training Your Best Friend

Christie Fernandez  
trainingyourbestfriend.com  
(919) 368-5873

### Paws in Training

Angel Wasserman  
pawsintraining.com  
(919) 896-2859

### Family Paws

Jennifer Shryock  
familypaws.com  
(919) 961-1608

### Rising Star Dog Training

John Visconti  
risingstardogtraining.com  
(919) 977-0392

## Are you a Positive Trainer in the Durham Area? Tell us about yourself!

Email [Stephanie.Kirby@apsofdurham.org](mailto:Stephanie.Kirby@apsofdurham.org) with your business information and information about our Positive Training philosophy. We would love to come out to one of your training sessions or classes!

Learn more about Positive Training at [www.positively.com](http://www.positively.com).