

# Dog Trainer Safety Tidbits

*In no particular order*

*By Jeff Coltenback*

The following numbered items are some factors to consider so you can provide a safe dog training experience for you, the dog and your human client. These are in no particular order. My hope is that the following items provide some useful practices for you. I also encourage you to always think outside the box and be as prepared as possible. It is always better to be over-prepared than underprepared.

1. Check your equipment before each use. Leashes, collars and other tools can get worn out after repetitive use. Make sure your tools are in good working condition. It also appropriate to relay this information to your clients as well. In fact, it is good customer service to go through all of your client's tools, leashes, etc and make sure they are in good working condition. Leashes with tears or frayed edges, although still usable, are garbage in my opinion.
2. Make sure tools you are using are safely secured to the dog. Prong collars, gentle leaders, haltis, etc can all come loose if not secured properly. Prongs that are not firmly clasped on can pop off. Haltis not secured to a dog's regular collar can slip of the muzzle. Muzzles not clipped properly can become loose (not good if you are dealing with a dog that needs to be muzzled). Some dogs are notorious for "backing out" of harnesses.
3. Survey your environment. Whether you are indoors or outdoors the environment can present some hazards. Use common sense. For example: If you are going to have a dog off leash, make sure you are in a secure, fenced in area. No matter how reliable a dog may be and no matter how safe the owner says it is the dog's safety and your reputation is on the line. Take safety precautions very seriously.
4. Are you working outdoors in a public setting where passersby or children could be at risk? Even if you are not working with an "aggressive" dog, take precautions. A happy dog may have a jumping problem and can easily jump up on a passerby or child, thus causing injury. We don't want this.
5. What about the weather or other environmental variables? Did it rain? Is the ground wet? Did it snow? Are there icy patches near where you are working? What about acorns? Don't laugh. I've busted my butt on a patch of acorns and almost lost control of a dog. It is OUR responsibility to put the dog and client in a position to succeed.

6. If you are working on handling or leash walking exercises with a client, make sure your “hand-off” of the leash is done safely, especially if you are working with a rambunctious or prey driven dog. Hold part of the leash as you exchange with another handler. I know it may seem unlikely. But, trust me, better safe than sorry. Almost all clients will appreciate your attention to detail.
7. Be mindful of working with geriatric dogs or dogs with hip or joint issues. If you are working indoors, a physically compromised dog may be at risk on hardwood or tile floors. If you notice this, seek out a carpeted or similar area for the safety of the dog.
8. What about your clothing? Are you comfortable? Your personal comfort, or lack of, can impact the energy you are giving off to the dog. A comfortable handler is a more confident handler! Wear comfortable and weather appropriate clothing. Is it summer time? Please leave the sandals at home. Always wear footwear that provides you with firm standing (pun intended). Sneakers or hiking boots are the best. Please.....NO SANDALS!! And, I hate to say it: guys leave the loafers at home and ladies, no need for high heels! ☺
9. Are you transporting a client’s dog in your vehicle? Dog seatbelts or crates are the safest way to travel. Maybe you leave your dog loose in your car. But, remember, your client’s dog is not yours. Travel safely.
10. Will you be providing board and train services where you board clients’ dogs in your home while you train them? Take the same safety approach in your own home. You may have a firm grasp on how your own pets live in your home. You will not immediately know how a “guest” will acclimate to your environment.
11. Exercise, as you will come to learn, if you don’t know already, is a crucial part of dog care, training and even behavior modification. Do you need to “work” a dog out before a training session? Make sure your work the dog within the parameters of its ability. Don’t run a senior dog too much. You may have to opt for other means of draining its energy. How about hot weather? Dogs can overheat very easily. Be smart. And, don’t rule out the extreme cold either. Cold weather can adversely impact a dog’s health.
12. What about the treats you are using? Have they been sitting in your car for months? Are they expired? Bacteria can grow anywhere. Be mindful of the treats you are offering the pups you are working with. We’ll discuss food and treats in a later course.

One final note: Always ask yourself a simple question. I hate to be redundant. But here is the question. Am I putting the dog and my client in a safe position to succeed?

# Puppy Safety Tidbits

*By Jeff Coltenback*

Working with puppies can be a whole different ball game. Puppies and even young adult, high energy dogs can get into trouble very easily. It is our job to teach our clients EVERYTHING they need to know to safely raise a puppy. Puppies always seem to be putting things in their mouths. That's how they experience the world. So, here are some useful tips for you. Let me start by stating the simplest form of puppy proofing a home. This one, simple approach is all, really, that is required. But, it often falls on deaf ears. A puppy should NEVER be left unsupervised for any reason. Now, I must be specific here. Supervision means that the puppy can actually be seen! Just being in the same house as a puppy, but in a different room, is NOT a supervised puppy. Closely supervising a puppy, or new rescue dog for that matter, is the best way to make sure the dog is safe. Moreover, it provides you with an opportunity to teach the dog boundaries. SUPERVISION, SUPERVISION, SUPERVISION!!! 😊

1. Since most people won't do #1 perfectly we will need to do a bit more. Puppy proofing the home is extremely important. What can the puppy get into? What hazards are in the home? Is there an area of the home the puppy should not have access to? Just some thought provoking questions.
2. What you need to do may seem odd. GET DOWN ON ALL FOURS and look at the world from the puppy's point of view. What can you see down there? TV or other wires; foreign objects under the sofa; infant pacifiers; remote controls; cell phones; pens/pencils; These are just some objects that may only be seen from the puppy's point of view. Get down and survey the area.
3. Baby/dog gates are an easy, inexpensive way to restrict the puppy from going where it shouldn't. Crate training is also useful. We'll get into crate training later on.
4. Child proof drawer or cabinet clasps are often necessary to ensure the puppy can't access harmful chemicals or other household products.
5. Does the home have the "lever" style of door knobs? Dogs quickly and easily learn how to jump up and use their paws to open a door. Child proof door knob mechanisms are readily available and affordable.
6. Are there critters in the home that people are trying to eradicate? Rodent poison, bug traps and pesticides offer a fatal consequence to the curious puppy.
7. How about those easy to use garbage cans? Yea, opening those are quickly learned as well. Secure that garbage.
8. Dedicate an area of the house that is secure and is a NO DOG ZONE. The garage or secure pantry could be an easy solution where owners can store all hazardous material safely away from the puppy/dog.