

Freedom, When do you give your dog freedom?

Too much freedom breeds too much confidence too quickly. Most of us love to “let the dog run free, to be free” like if they were in the wild. Most dog lovers are also nature lovers by heart. But when is freedom too much and not enough. When your dog is a young puppy, too much freedom can cause “accidents” in the house. When your dog is maturing from birth to two years old, too much freedom can cause an “over confident-dominant dog”. Some people leave their dogs blocked off in a kitchen or bathroom area so that they can “have room to play” when they are not there. A “FREE DOG” is open to enjoy him/herself on your molding, chairs, doors, toilet paper, rug, etc... These are now behaviors that will start to be conditioned into the dog and hard to correct later in life. You don’t have to wait until their “chewing phase” ends.

It has been observed that “free dogs” can become very destructive and aggressive towards their owner, hyper, uncontrollable, and even mark “their” territory uncontrollably. These are dogs that eventually go to a shelter because they become very difficult to handle. Too much freedom at an early age for most dogs becomes the main source of handling problems later on.

What can you do?

One of your best tools is the crate. Use the crate to housebreak, while you’re away from home and when you both need a “time out” to catch your breath again. Dogs are a lot of work, just like children. They need constant supervision and molding to grow into great members of the family and society.

When they are out and about.

Let’s say your dog is all housebroken and you are starting to allow him more freedom in the house. He is allowed to go where he wants, play with what he wants and run around uncontrolled by a leash. That is a nice time for both you and the dog. But what happens when your dog starts to run crazy through the house, barks out the window on the back of the couch, urinates in a “special” area in your bedroom, steals food off the counter, chases the children and bites at their clothes. Now he is learning what freedom “really” tastes like. He is building his confidence at a very young age a little too quickly and if he continues to have this freedom, he is just going to get worse. Dogs learn through their environment, positive and negative reinforcement and conditioning. Whether you are there or not, they are learning habits, “conditioned behavior”. So why not put the leash on and show/train your dog what you expect from him: to lie down and chew a bone instead of run crazy barking. By you taking him by the leash and reinforcing a long down next to you while you are eating, working on the computer, watching TV or wherever. You are setting up the next 10-15 years with him. You don’t have to wait until he “calms down” or get over that chewing phase” because your going to be waiting years!

HELP, what can I do now?

Two things: Limit freedom and make your puppy/dog earn it.

Limit freedom by using the crate when you're not there. Put your pup on leash when you're at home and want to monitor your dog's behavior. Show him what you want in a positive way. Use a sterilized real cow's marrowbone filled with peanut butter or cheese to work on long down stays.

Can my dog ever be off leash?

Yes; When? When you want to play fetch inside the house or periodically to test the dog and see how they are going to "manage themselves physically". Key word here, themselves. Train your dog to control himself. You are not always going to be there to do it for them. It is too draining to be there every second with your dog for the next fifteen or so years. But if you can do it for three or six months, you've got it made.

ALL DOGS WANT TO PLEASE!!

They do, trust me! As soon as they know how to, they will. But they don't know how until you show them. Think of it this way: "A dog is like a settler who comes to a foreign country. She/he makes observations and embraces the customs of that country. If the parents are content and they smile and help and cooperate with each other, she/he learns that in this country that's the way people are."

Take the time to train your dog. It only takes minutes here and there through out the day and the payoff is GREAT!! If you continue to allow the dog to perform a behavior and not reinforce or show them a different alternative, they will continue to perform that behavior.