

The Dog Scout Way

The Dog Scout Way encompasses so much! It is the basis of the Dog Scouts organization and covers all the stuff that we, as “the smart end of the leash” need to know.

The Dog Scout Way is a way of life. This can be better understood by working with a troop and/or Scoutmaster, attending a camp or mini camp and/or by learning and practicing the items you need to know for the Dog Scout certification.



You understand that the use of the term “parent” has been used to describe you as the dog’s handler, owner, caretaker, etc. because DSA defines parent as: A person who raises, nurtures, loves, provides for, teaches and protects a younger being so that he or she can become a welcome and productive member of society. This comprises all the tasks involved in raising a youngster to be an independent adult. You know that parenting begins even before the youngster is born or adopted, it is a part of the relationship within a family and it is something that lasts a lifetime.

You understand that many people who share their lives with dogs have the same level of bond with their dogs as most people have with their human children. While it is understood that as far as the law is concerned, dogs are considered property, you feel the relationship is much greater than that of object and property owner. Being a responsible dog owner involves parenting.

As a Dog Scout parent, we hope you have learned how to be the “thinking” end of the leash. You give your dog the attention and protection he deserves, and you are not afraid to tell another person to get his or her dog back from your dog if your dog gets uncomfortable. You handle any situations that arise so that your dog doesn’t have to. That’s the covenant you have with your dog. You are aware of the environment and the changing situations around your dog. You know your dog well enough to know what types of situations will make your dog nervous. You do everything you can to manage, control or avoid those types of situations. When your dog sees that he or she no longer has to be ‘on guard’ for developing situations (because you have taken on that job), the dog will be able to relax more and will be less reactive.

You have learned to have your dog look at you on cue, which alone can get you out of potentially sticky situations. When your dog is looking at you, he is not

making direct eye contact with another dog (a threat in dog language.) It also appears to other dogs as if your dog is 'looking away,' which is a calming signal and will help other dogs around you be less reactive with your dog. A dog that is paying attention to you is not 'surfing the environment' for better and more interesting things. He knows that you are the giver of wonderful things and that his good behavior is what gets him access to the smells, sights and interaction in the environment. By making the dog responsible for his own behavior management, you have to do less asking for good behavior (sit, don't pull, leave it, don't jump on that, etc.), which gives you more time to just enjoy your dog and be proud of how smart he or she is.

You know how to conduct yourself in public. You are a good representative of a responsible dog parent. You clean up any messes your dog leaves behind (feces, urine, vomit, hair, half chewed rawhides, etc.) so that you will not be the cause of a ban on dogs (in a hotel, park, or other public place.) You obey all laws and rules regarding your dog and keep them on leash or under excellent verbal control to keep them safe. You don't allow your dog to harass people or interfere with their right to enjoy a public place. You set a good example that shows the joys of the human-canine bond. Your dog is under control and well behaved, showing people what is possible with positive training. You know that if we, as dog parents, are to keep from losing any more privileges, we must act responsibly, and must lead by example in our communities. We must always pick up our own dog's waste, and when possible, pick up a few extras to keep dog parents from getting a bad reputation because of a few irresponsible people.

You treat your dog with kindness, knowing that while he or she may not be "perfect," your dog is PERFECT at being a dog. Unlike Pinocchio, your dog will not magically wake up one morning a "real boy." He will always be a dog, and we, as parents, have to respect the differences in our species. You have taken it upon yourself to learn as much as possible about those differences and how to bridge the communication gaps.

You know that punishment creates fear, and learning is difficult or impossible where there is fear. Your dog is not afraid to offer behaviors, worried that he might be "wrong" and get punished. I hope you both have learned that "wrong" is not "bad," it is only information, and nothing to be afraid of. If incorrect behavior does not get rewarded, it makes the correct behavior (that does get rewarded) more clear to the dog. Punishment is not needed for the dog to understand when he has made the 'wrong' choice.

As a person, I hope you also realize that being wrong is just feedback from your universe, and that success can often be a 1000-step process, with many wrong answers and dead-ends along the way. When Thomas Edison created the light bulb, it is said that he had 1000 trials that ended in no light bulb. A reporter asked him if he felt like a failure because he had 'failed' 1000 times. Edison replied that he was not a failure, he created the light bulb, it was just a 1000 step

process. Don't be discouraged if a behavior you want to teach your dog becomes a 1000 step process, there is a light at the end of that tunnel. As a dog trainer, you must have a lot of patience and be willing to keep trying, even when you are not seeing instant results.

You realize that dogs will work better for positive reinforcement, and that the problem with punishment training is that you must always have the threat of punishment looming over your dog's head to get him to perform. He will never do what you ask because he "wants" to—he is only performing to escape a punishment. You also know that punishment inhibits ALL behaviors, so if you punish for one behavior, the dog will be afraid to perform any behaviors for fear it will result in punishment. You know that for this reason, crossover dogs will take longer to learn to trust that you will not punish them. (Note- crossover dogs are dogs that started their training with a punishment based training method, but now have a trainer that uses all positive training.)

Knowing what you now know, we hope you will go home with this information and spread it like a good "disease", infecting everyone everywhere you go with responsible dog parenting and positive training methods. Like a pebble dropping into the water, the ripples reach out far from the original point of entry and touch others along the way. We hope you will become involved in community service and public education in the communities where you live, because you WILL have an impact on those around you, even if it is just by letting people observe the joy of having a well-mannered dog and being a responsible parent. That is the Dog Scout Way.

The following DSA web pages (www.dogscouts.org) and links cover the topics referred to above.

- Notes from DSA Class page
- How Dogs Learn page
- The book- [Culture Clash](#) by Jean Donaldson ISBN: 1-888047-05-4
- Article- "He just wants to say Hi" by Suzanne Clothier
<http://www.flyingdogpress.com/sayhi.html>
- Dog Scout class video (available from the Certification Program Director)