

Proofing Your Dog



I ran across this cartoon and thought, "This says a lot!" Those of us who compete with our dogs know how hard it is to work with our dogs when there is stuff going on around us - you have to train your dog to work with distractions around it, called "proofing" your dog.

Proofing your dog will make your dog steadier in distracting environments (dog shows, obedience trials, parks, playgrounds - life in general!) and it will be easier to get his attention when distractions are around if you have done proofing. So the more proofing you do, the better attention your dog will give you. And it doesn't matter what you are training for, proofing will help with anything.

To proof your dog, take him to places he hasn't been or where there is a lot going on. Make sure you have really yummy treats for this, something that will grab his attention (pretty much anything for a ridgeback). It helps if you have taught your dog a "Watch" or "Focus" command, which means to look at your face. Work your dog in this new environment with simple things the first time, and KEEP THE LESSON SHORT - 10 - 15 minutes.

If you are at a really busy place, position yourself so you are a good distance from the activity the first few times. When you take the dog to this place again, you can increase the complexity of your commands and expect him to work a bit better. Keep doing this in lots of different places, with more and more distractions as your dog's focus improves. You can increase the length of the lessons, but do not make them so long your dog gets tired and loses interest. 30 minutes of work for a mature dog is a long time when doing this kind of training and doing brain work is a lot harder for a dog than physical exercise.

One way to increase the time of the lessons is to take breaks in between - play with your dog for a few minutes or walk him around, then go back to lessons. If you choose this method of training, keep the lessons to the 10 minute length. So keep an eye on your dog's body language and when he starts to show signs of being tired or stressed, do something he does really well, and then end the lesson.

I teach Foundation Obedience and Manners classes, and I also offer Moving Forward: Improving Obedience classes at French Creek Pet Resort in Snohomish. The Foundation classes are for beginner dogs (and handlers!) and the Moving Forward classes are for people who are interested in competing at the Novice level. It's also a good class for proofing your dogs - we do a lot of different Novice things in this class and incorporate items from AKC, UKC and Rally. It's also a good class for bringing your dog just to get some work in - a great idea for older dogs that are retired, semi-retired or need some brushing up - or you just want to have some bonding time with your pup. You can work your dog at whatever level you like and can opt out of any exercises you don't want to do.

For more information, you can check out our website at www.frenchcreekpetresort.com and we are also on Facebook. You can also contact me directly.

Train, don't complain!

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