



Are Extra-Large Dogs Right for Me?

Giant Dogs: Size Matters

Are you a giant dog lover? Make sure you are prepared for the added responsibility of a super-sized dog before bringing one home. Do your own research on breed specific qualities. To get you started, here is some basic information on owning and raising a well-behaved large breed dog.

Extra large canines, weighing in at 100-plus pounds, include breeds like the Great Dane, Great Pyrenees, Newfoundland, St. Bernard, English Mastiff, and Irish Wolfhound. Generally, big dogs are calmer and more laid back than their smaller counterparts. Large breed dogs tend to have an average lifespan of 7-10 years, whereas smaller breeds can usually live up to 15+ years. Remember **big dogs have big needs**. They eat more food and have big byproducts, need large beds and toys, large cars, large home space, have big vet bills, and higher insurance rates. Also, many rental properties don't allow giant dogs.

Good manners training is mandatory for giant canines starting at 8 weeks old and early socialization is a must. Large dogs have the ability to cause significant injury and even death to humans and other dogs if poorly socialized or trained. If appropriate behaviors are reinforced early, inappropriate behaviors are less likely to occur.

Important good manners/behaviors to teach your large dog:

- *Polite Greeting.* Jumping on humans is rude behavior for any dog, but is particularly unwanted with large dogs. Reinforce "Sit" as a greeting or default behavior so it's the first thing that she does even when excited or meeting new people. Also, avoid picking up your giant puppy for cuddling. Spend time cuddling on the floor so she doesn't try to climb in your lap when she weighs more than you do.
- *Polite Leash Walking.* She will be strong enough to drag around an adult man when she reaches adolescence. If you can't keep her under control on a leash, she won't be able to go for walks and become well socialized. Start training polite leash skills while your puppy is small with lots of treats and praise. If you missed the puppy stage with your dog, consider using a Gentle Leader® or front-clip control harness to keep gentle control of your giant while retraining leash behavior.
- *Say Please.* Teach your dog that good things happen to dogs who sit. This prevents her from learning how to push people around with her immense size. The goal is for her to sit, without being asked, for anything she wants (for example, go outside, have dinner, or sit on the couch).

- *Settle.* Some people don't appreciate a jumbo dog drooling in their lap. Teach your dog that "settle", or lying at the feet of humans, gets rewarded with treats and petting. Ignore demanding behavior like whining or barking, so she learns only a calm "settle" gets rewarded.
- *Go To Your Place.* This behavior is important if you have guests that don't appreciate super-sized canines. Her "spot" can be an out of the way corner or a comfy dog bed placed away from guests, but where she can still see what's going on. If you use a portable "spot", like a bed or rug, you can bring it with you for outings or move it to a different room as needed.
- *Leave It.* Giant breeds have easier access to food on tables or countertops, so teaching her to "leave it" and not feeding table scraps will allow you to keep your human food safe. Your "leave it" cue will cause her to turn her attention away from a coveted object in anticipation of a better treat from you.
- *Sharing With Others.* Resource-guarding in a large dog can be exponentially more disastrous than the same issue in a small breed dog. Teach your pup that having humans approach when she is eating or has a high-value toy or rawhide is a great thing. When she has these items, occasionally approach and drop a few delicious goodies. Don't grab her food bowl away; this may cause food-bowl stress. She will soon learn that your presence by her food or toys is not a threat, but an opportunity for more good stuff. **CAUTION:** If you have a serious resource or food guarder at home, big or small, contact a qualified positive reinforcement trainer or behavior specialist to help you modify this potentially dangerous behavior.
- *Trade.* You don't want to argue over a toy with your big dog. Teach her to "Trade" by offering treats when she has a toy in her mouth. This makes her drop the toy to eat and then give the toy back to her. She then learns that she gets two rewards - the treat for giving up her toy and the toy back when she's done. "Trade" will allow you to take away the occasional "illegal" objects that you can't return to her, without outweighing the positive impact of the two-reward trades.
- *Bite Inhibition.* It's natural canine behavior to bite. Good bite inhibition can make the difference between a dent in the skin and plastic surgery, or if your dog lives or dies - serious dog bites may cause your dog to be deemed dangerous. Puppies naturally learn to control their force when playing with siblings and you can do the same with her to reinforce this behavior. Instill good bite inhibition in your pup by gradually decreasing the force of her bite rather than punishing all bites. Soft bites don't hurt and equal more playtime and hard bites hurt and equal an end to playtime. If she bites hard enough to cause pain, calmly say "Ouch!" and walk away. You can then begin playing a short time later. She will learn to control her bite so she can have fun without interruption.

Use positive training methods.

This teaches your dog to willingly and happily respond to your requests and avoid conflict. Force-based training (being dominant over your dog) is old-

fashioned and tends to cause fear and aggressive behaviors in dogs, which can be very difficult to manage when your dog is the same size as you.

Dogs naturally growl to communicate they are stressed by, uncomfortable with, or feel threatened by something. Try to identify the source of her discomfort and put distance between her and the cause. Next, start a formal and thorough counter-conditioning program, to help her form new and happy associations with whatever frightened her. If your dog ever bites you or someone else, or you have difficulty working on her growling behavior, immediately seek help from a qualified positive behavior consultant who is familiar with fearful and aggressive dogs.