

Many Tears Animal Rescue

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Advice if you are Adopting a Deaf Dog

Dogs that cannot hear are quite often written off as too difficult to train, unable to recall or be let off lead and generally unable to live a 'normal' life. But a deaf dog only has one of the five senses missing and can accommodate for this loss much better than you might imagine. With their heightened sense of smell and eager eyes, a deaf dog can understand, interact and learn just as well as their hearing companions. With a little time and imagination from their owners, a deaf dog can learn all the behaviours that a hearing dog can, including recall. Training a deaf dog is not really that different to training a hearing dog. At most it will involve a little more time and patience, but it is possible and deafness is not ever an excuse for a poorly behaved, under trained dog.

Before your start remember:

Train your dog using whatever motivates them, be it a food treat or a favourite toy. Keep training sessions short (5-10 mins per session) and always end training sessions on a positive note such as an easy trick that you know your dog can perform. Never shout or lose your temper and never train if you or your dog is tired or getting bored. Always use positive training methods as you will get much better results and your dog will thank you for it.

Hand Signals

The key to a 'normal' relationship with your deaf dog is to substitute the spoken word for some hand signals. You can make up your own signs to suit you and your dog. Have some fun and be inventive but bear in mind that all signs should be clear, easily distinguishable from other signs and preferably even performed away from your body so that your sign is clearly visible to your dog. For this reason adapt them to your own needs and make them something that you can easily remember. See how you get on and don't be afraid to adapt your signs to your own dog's needs.

Using Sign Language with a Deaf Dog

Whatever signs you choose, be consistent. Make a note of the signs you intend to use and maybe draw them out. Put them on the fridge door or somewhere easy to view and stick to those signs.

Start to use your signs exactly as you would normally speak to a hearing dog. Start with some everyday pleasant events such as a sign for 'dinner time' and a sign for 'walkies'. These are two activities that most dogs love. So, for example, get your dog's attention with a gentle tap near the shoulder blades and sign for 'dinner' and then put the food bowl down or sign for 'walks' and immediately get the dog lead off it's hook. You will be amazed at how quickly your deaf dog will come to associate the sign with the event that follows. Keep using your chosen sign and watch your dog's reaction. If they respond with excitement and prepare for walks or dinner then you have successfully communicated to your deaf dog.

You will be surprised how the rest of the signs will follow easily. Your deaf dog soon learns that your hands and movements are telling them interesting things.

Speak as you Sign

It is always a good idea, when signing, to also speak to your dog. If you are signing something happy such as 'walkies', it helps if you are smiling as you sign. As you sign 'walkies' also say 'walkies' and this will show in your face. Dogs are experts at reading body language, including facial expressions. The sign will be learnt quicker and have more meaning to your dog. Of course, the same goes for naughty signs such as 'no'. Perform your sign for 'no' but also say 'no' at the same time, which will help you to convey your meaning.

Training a Deaf Dog with Hand Signals

Now you are in the swing of using your hand signals consistently and for everyday activities, you can begin some basic training. Remember, you are training a dog, it just happens to be a deaf dog. The basic rule is to train the same way you would train a hearing dog but add hand signals to your verbal commands. It is important to remember this. All the usual rules of good basic dog training apply.