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Building a Lasting Bond

Advocates 4 Animals Rescue co-founder, Amy Beatty, works one on one with rescue dog Daisy. Through consistency and positive reinforcement, Daisy and Amy have developed a special bond of trust and respect for each other.

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by Stacey Ritz, M.Ed.

We've all seen them, the dog walking leashless, happily side by side with her human companion, without a care in the world. How is the canine so devoted to her owner? Why isn't she running off and chasing the squirrels across the street?

Your own dog may require a leash on walks and may tug and whimper at others along the way while you repeat your pleas of "No! Stop!" to no avail. What are the differences between your dog and the leashless dog? What creates the magic of building a lasting bond between a dog and a human?

Many people believe that you must adopt a canine when she is a young puppy, in order to properly build a true bond. Furthermore, many believe that regular punishments for improper behavior are the keys to molding dogs into the "perfect" companions. In truth, the answer to building a lasting bond between yourself and your dog is an involved recipe. The recipe requires consistent daily effort, knowledge, respect and love. Sounds pretty easy, right? It is! Once you possess the knowledge, it is up to you to put forth the effort and time to build a lasting bond with your canine companion.

Where do we start? The first order of business is to determine if your dog is motivated by treats or by affection. Once you know the basis of motivation you will know how to properly reward positive behavior

on a consistent basis. The next step includes a recipe of many efforts put forth on a daily basis. All ingredients in the recipe are necessary, but their order of introduction may vary.

► DAILY EXERCISE

Whether you choose to roller-blade, run or bike with your dog, daily exercise is a must when building a lasting bond with your dog. Rules and boundaries are enforced during exercise, as well as the importance of exercising our minds and muscles while enjoying the great outdoors.

► PLAYTIME

Not to be confused with daily exercise; playtime is relaxed and can include retrieving, swimming or visiting the local dog park. There are many activities that can fit into this category - the important thing is to spend 20 minutes daily, engaged in playtime with your dog. Spending time together will only help to develop and strengthen the bond between yourself and your dog.

► SOCIALIZATION

The ingredient of socialization should not be overlooked. Socialization is time that you are spending time with your dog. It is important to allow your dog to be part of your life. After work, do you let your dog in the backyard while you have a seat on the couch? Your dog has

been home alone for hours and is excited to see you. Embracing this excitement is a great time to enhance and build a special bond. Going outdoors with your dog and enjoying playtime during this moment is an excellent choice.

► RULES & BOUNDARIES

We all need some rules and boundaries in our life; they allow us to be clear of expectations and to learn respect for one another. Rules and boundaries may vary from household to household, but the important thing is that they do exist.

► POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Positive reinforcement in the form of small treats or affection will assist your canine in developing appropriate behavior for the various environments and situations that occur in life. With consistency, your dog will learn that he is rewarded for proper behavior and you will be able to enjoy each others company in a relaxed and harmonious environment.

► YOUR ENERGY AND CONFIDENCE LEVELS

Dogs have a strong ability to sense our energy and confidence levels. These levels are portrayed in our words, our tone of voice, our body movements and our reactions to stimulants in the environment. Your dog looks to you as a pack leader, and if you are lacking confidence, your dog will pick up on this and will lose respect for you, causing a downward spiral of negative events. Your energy and confidence levels should not be underestimated. Although these elements can not be witnessed as a tangible object, they are one of the strongest indicators in developing a lasting bond with our canine companions.

► ENVIRONMENT

It seems so simple! Have a happy and inviting environment for our canine companions. But it's important to be conscious of the little

things. Do you greet your dog when you come home from work? Are exercise and playtime a part of your daily routine?

► NUTRITION

If you feed your dog a human grade, high-quality, organic food- you understand the importance of good nutrition. For those who may still be feeding commercial food products, it is encouraged that you research the advantages of a raw food diet, in addition to products deemed human-grade. Proper nutrition allows your dog to feel her best, and when you prepare her food and sit with her during feeding time, the bond between you will undoubtedly grow leaps and bounds. Feeding time is a very important ritual and should be held at approximately the same time every day.

► SPAY/NEUTER

Having your pet spayed or neutered has countless benefits. According to spayusa.org, "Altering your canine friend will increase his life an average of one to three years. Altered animals have a very low to no risk of mammary gland tumors/cancer, prostate cancer, perianal tumors, pyometria, and uterine, ovarian and testicular cancers. Sterilizing your dog makes (them) a better pet, reducing (their) urge to roam and decreasing the risk of contracting diseases or getting hurt as they roam. Surveys indicate that as many as 85% of dogs hit by cars are unaltered." Our pets depend on us to make the right decisions regarding their health and wellness, and it is up to each of us to become educated and take appropriate actions to make their health and happiness a priority.

► TIME

Life gets busy, but it's important to remember that your canine companion has been patiently waiting all day for your arrival and she is ready to exercise and spend important bond building time together. Whether your dog is a puppy, adult or senior, spending time together



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may be one of the most important things you can do to build and enhance your lifelong bond.


After a senior Chihuahua was deemed "unadoptable" by shelter workers, Advocates 4 Animals Rescue, Inc. welcomed the dog into their program and the ingredients in the recipe of building a lasting bond were employed immediately and consistently. The senior canine had not been able to receive her vaccinations at the shelter, because of extreme biting and growling behaviors. Within a week of living with a volunteer foster home at Advocates 4 Animal, the senior Chihuahua, dearly named "Grandma," had a successful visit to the veterinarian and received all of her vaccinations, tests and a full health check.

What made Grandma change? Grandma made significant strides when she entered her foster home. It was immediately determined that Grandma was motivated by both treats and affection- and therefore both elements were actively used when working with Grandma on a daily basis. In addition, all elements included in the recipe for building a lasting bond were employed. Grandma's foster mom was not fearful of her biting and growling tendencies noted at the shelter. Instead she envisioned Grandma wagging her tail and enjoying the freedom of her new life. Within one week, her vision had become a reality. Grandma exercises daily...and she is leashless! A level of respect has been and is continuously developed and enhanced on a daily basis between Grandma and her human companion.



Veterinarians estimate that Grandma Gracie may be 15+ years of age. Grandma Gracie was rescued after a cruel life in a puppy mill. Her bond with Advocates 4 Animals Executive Director, Stacey Ritz, has developed over a few short months.

As they walk side by side through the busy neighborhood sidewalks, Grandma and her human are completely relaxed, confident and happy. I couldn't imagine a better image of contentment and of pure bliss. Grandma may be a senior dog with an unimaginable past of abuse and neglect, but when the ingredients of a lasting bond are used on a consistent basis, both dogs and humans can live in the moment and truly live the life they have both visualized - one of peace, happiness, and harmony.

Puppies, adults and senior dogs alike, will all respond positively to the recipe of building a lasting bond, if the ingredients are used consistently and with respect and love for your canine companion. Both dogs and humans crave a balanced existence; a life full of love, respect, and wagging tails - what more could we ask for? 

Stacey Ritz, M.Ed. is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of Advocates 4 Animals Rescue & Rehabilitation, Inc. in Ohio. She is also a Professional Member of the Cat Writers Association, Dog Writers Association of America and She Writes. Stacey is also a member of the International Association of Animal Behavior

Consultants and of the National Association of Pet Rescue Professionals. She is a pet behavior consultant, acclaimed speaker and freelance writer. For more information, visit www.Advocates4Animals.com or www.StaceyRitz.com



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