



The Pros & Cons of...

Residential Dog Obedience Training

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Residential training services are becoming increasingly more popular as an option for obedience training one's dog. It is believed that one of the primary reasons for choosing this route is due to vast and varied changes in lifestyles, encompassing the often unplanned alterations in relationships, jobs, and living situations, not to mention decreasing public tolerance of out-of-control dogs. Dog owners are finding themselves faced with situations and challenges with which they can not cope, pigeon-holed without the time or experience to seek-out and commit to the necessary programme on their own. Residential training in these and other instances can have many benefits, however, it is not for every dog, or every dog owner. Therefore, this document has been written to explore the pro's and con's of residential training services to help dog owners make well-educated decisions for both themselves and their dogs.

What is Residential Training?

Residential training entails having the dog live *residentially* at the training school for the duration of the training. The dog is kennelled and allocated to one Trainer whose main responsibilities are to:

- Understand the owner obedience and behaviour management challenges
- Understand the dog and owner lifestyle, and/or desired lifestyle
- Create the necessary bond with the dog and earn its trust
- Assess the dog and set realistic expectations for the owner at course end
- Basic obedience train the dog to a high standard, in keeping with their level of learning
- Provide the owner with a demonstration of the exercises learned
- Provide the owner with comprehensive, hands-on and written instruction on the reinforcement techniques used
- Prescribe a very pointed in-home programme to practise the skills
- Prescribe a very pointed in-home programme to address any behaviour management issues to complement the obedience
- Schedule a follow-up session with the owner and dog
- Provide necessary aftercare support

The Benefits:

One of the most attractive benefits of residential training is having one's dog trained while on holiday, a time when the dog would otherwise already be boarded. Additionally, many dogs owners choose to have their dogs trained when they are moving house, recovering from an illness or surgery, or are having their garden landscaped for pro-active convenience purposes. Residential training is also -

- Efficient - Although all obedience training requires the owner to learn and practise the skills, residential training puts the hard work in up-front, therefore transitioning an already-trained dog back to their home environment, leaving the owner with the sole responsibility of committing to what's been taught

- Effective - The focus for a dog in a residential programme is on training, therefore they quickly associate attention with training, which is a rewarding experience. Furthermore, since obedience is expected and reinforced at all times, there is little opportunity for conflicting messages outside of the training sessions to interfere with what's being learned
- Controlled - Expert Trainers are able to simulate complex situations to challenge the dog with the utmost sensitivities to their safety and level of learning

The Considerations:

As with any training option, there are detriments, or pitfalls to consider. For instance, some dogs, and breeds in particular, do not take to kennelling and are vulnerable to losing weight or falling ill. Dogs with extreme anxiety, whether fear, phobic or otherwise may be too stressed by the experience creating a barrier that does not promote learning and may be harmful to the dog's emotional stability.

Additionally, one of the most common reasons why residential training may fail is when the expectations for the service do not meet the behavioural problem, or problems presented. For instance, residential training usually does not address toileting issues, separation anxiety, excessive barking or chasing cats, to mention a few. Some behaviour is the result of boredom or unchannelled energy and will resume when the routine resumes. Also consider that there are many behaviours that dogs display in or outside of the home that can not be simulated in such an environment, or perhaps are not triggered without the owner's presence. Some perceived obedience challenges may be more related to the relationship of the dog within the family unit, or are so deeply imbedded through early trauma that counter-conditioning the behaviour may take a lifetime with a multi-faceted approach, and can not possibly be understood, let alone altered by any turn-key and time restrictive solution. There are some forms of genetic behaviour that can not be reversed, again, setting unrealistic expectations for the owner. Although the aforementioned cases are relatively rare, their stories of ill success are enough to give residential training a questionable reputation. This is not to say that a good residential programme can not address, or include a very specific programme to complement the obedience learned at the time of the tuition, rather that the time and energy may have been better spent with a different, perhaps more pointed approach to the specific problematic behaviour. Nonetheless, while some dogs are prime candidates for residential training, there are some that are not.

Another example of when residential training is likely doomed to fail when the owner enters the contract with a "quick fix" mentality. The dog displays problematic behaviour and the owner sends the dog away to "be cured". In these situations, the owner may knowingly or unknowingly omit details about the dog's history and history of behaviour, perhaps because they are not connected enough to the dog to recognise their importance, and/or can not be bothered with dealing with it themselves. These dog owners are almost always disappointed with the results and blame the institution for failing them. Unfortunately, residential training attracts many such dog owners.

With this said, it is vitally important for owners to be aware that having their dog trained by someone else is not the end all and be all... training is an ongoing practise that will always and forever include the two following key factors from the owner:

- Commitment - As mentioned, the owner must be committed to learning and practising the skills. Dogs are opportunists and will fall into old habits if allowed to do so. Residential training will not be effective if the owner does not become pro-actively involved in keeping up with the training
- Consistency - Obedience can not be turned on and turned off, rules must be established both in and outside of the home, and be consistent with all members and visitors to the home. Dogs do not generalise well, and unless you are consistent with the rules at all times will the dog understand that the rules apply in any and all circumstances. Residential training will not work if obedience is only expected in "obedience situations" - in addition, will be counter-productive if there are no boundaries elsewhere in the relationship

What to Look for in a Residential Programme:

As long as the dog owners is well-educated on the features and benefits of the service, and is realistic about the expectations given their dog's temperament, history and nature of the challenges, the next, equally important step is to seek out the most qualified and responsible residential services. A good programme will -

- Employ qualified and experienced obedience trainers with a solid background in behaviour management
- Employ a qualified and experienced care and accommodations team with shared backgrounds in diet, health, cleanliness and First Aid
- Be able to answer your questions promptly, knowledgeably and professionally
- Have a clear outline of the training process and training experience expectations
- Will ask for as much background information on the dog as possible
- Allow tours of the facility prior to booking
- Allow observations of training sessions and demonstrations
- Have a safe and secure facility
- Have clean, spacious kennels with both private sleeping quarters and an outdoor run
- Have both indoor and outdoor training venues as weather permits and as the training requires
- Have access to a variety of environments in which to hold more advanced and realistic training sessions
- Provides honest and clear assessments and training expectations
- Offer aftercare services

A good programme will not -

- Use compulsive training methods
- Make unrealistic guarantees
- Set unrealistic expectations
- Sell the service that does not meet the needs of the dog owner

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For more information, please visit www.royvon.co.uk and www.trainyourpuppy.co.uk



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