

Affenpinschers are appearing more frequently in the obedience ring. For many years it was mistakenly believed these little dogs were "too stubborn to train". The truth of the matter is they are very intelligent little dogs, easily bored with repetitive or forced training, and, like their terrier forebears, inclined to think independently. While they can be stubborn, like terriers, they are generally eager to please.

Affenpinschers can become dominating little presences in their homes so even if your goal is not to compete in the obedience ring, a puppy kindergarten class is strongly encouraged for your pet Affen. The Affenpinscher must learn he is NOT the leader of his pack; however, he will be happy to assume that role if his owner fails to exercise authority.

A good puppy class not only will reinforce the pack relationship between you and your Affen, it also will socialize him with other puppies. In a good puppy class, the puppy will learn very basic commands which will make him a much better pet: sit, down, stay and controlled walking.

A trained dog is much more pleasant around the house. The trained dog is an asset and a welcome addition to your home and not a general nuisance. You and your guests will appreciate having a dog who knows and obeys basic obedience commands.

Like most other breeds, the Affen responds far better to positive training than to negative methods. Most Affens respond readily and happily to food and praise. When training an Affenpinscher, whether in class or in your home, always reinforce desired behavior and try, if possible, to ignore undesirable behavior or to discourage it with minimum impact to the dog.

Try to make training a pleasant time for both you and your dog. Be consistent and repeat commands but keep the training interesting and challenging. Your success as a trainer may be dependent on your choice of a trainer. Check the credentials of any dog club or dog school in which you are interested. Ask to attend a class to watch the interaction of instructors, students and dogs.

Directions for all exercises should be specific and understandable. The instructor should be prepared to suggest alternate methods of training the same exercise. Not every dog will respond identically to each method and a good instructor will not insist on using the same method for every breed in his or her class.

See if there are small dogs in the classes. Find out how the instructor feels about training a toy dog. There are some instructors who have never trained toy breeds and may not be familiar with some of the different techniques needed. Ask graduates of the class about their training experiences. Don't settle for an instructor or trainer if you are not happy with your discoveries. Keep looking until you find the school and class which is right for you and your Affenpinscher.

While you may be an excellent trainer, training in a class is important if you intend to compete in obedience trials. The dog must become accustomed to group exercises (long sits and downs) and to distractions which cannot be provided in a home environment.

For more information on obedience regulations, see the American Kennel Club pamphlet "Obedience Regulations" <http://www.akc.org/pdfs/rulebooks/RO2999.pdf>