

Pet Dog Training Instructors

Courses established 2005, PDTI Register established 2010

RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP (RDO) ... available to all members

PDTI Levels 1&2 are designed to ensure your knowledge as a dog owner and enthusiast, especially as you are moving into, or working in, an area that is giving guidance to other owners, families and carers. Just through this role, your clients / students may assume that you are an 'expert' in dogs generally, frequently asking you all sorts of questions other than dog training and behaviour. It is therefore just as important that you fully understand the limits on the advice you should actually give and when, where and to whom to refer.

- Expectations in today's society ... You only have to look around you to see how this has changed over the last twenty to thirty years, let alone how this developed long back in our history. It is also interesting to compare this with the way life with dogs differs in different countries and how changes in behaviour have affected social acceptability today, attitudes, local byelaws, dog restriction areas etc.

Over the last decades we have seen an end to latch-key and stray dogs, where dogs kept themselves to themselves as they roamed the streets unsupervised, and we have seen the various canine organisations trying to ensure owners control their dogs and clear up after them, with some urban Councils dealing with complaints through 'pest control' departments and not 'welfare'. We see increases in exclusion zones and restricted areas, and with that we have seen an increase in devoted dog areas, which are often just a small corner of a park / estate that quickly become muddy, well-trodden, dog toilets, due to some irresponsible people letting their dog(s) in the enclosure and standing outside whilst the dog does its own thing.

The picture of a 'perfect' family dog to most, is one that wants to walk next to you on a loose lead, loyally staying with its family, able to run free in safe area, happily playing 'fetch' with a ball, coming back when called immediately, free to go everywhere, whilst it ignores other people and animals, unless deemed appropriate by time and place to greet or play. Many dogs fit this description however, in many areas we see an increase in uncontrolled behaviour, aggression often through frustration, pulling on leads being 'the norm', dogs rushing into the face of other dogs or jumping up at people without any manners, or running off to chase joggers or hunt squirrels, and not coming back when called. Ask yourself, why is this happening?

- Care and welfare aspects of living with dogs, feeding, housing, grooming, needs, etc ... The world-wide-web gives so much information, lots of books talk about the various aspects, lots of people with opinions. You would think that potential owners would research thoroughly before getting a dog, with memories of family dogs, many are shocked at the cost, the time, the changes to their life-style, discovering unintentional ignorance and misunderstanding, the fees of the supporting network of vets, kennels, dog walkers etc. For those in the instructing role, a certain amount of advice can be given, but your knowledge is subject to your own experience and research. The saying 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing' is worth considering, as only those who can show high levels of knowledge would be considered 'qualified' to advise others. For those who have done a first-aid course, you will have been told not to overstep your remit, and the same applies to all subjects, eg it might be tempting to tell someone to change their dogs diet, and suddenly find that you are deemed responsible for the health of the dog. Look up the veterinary surgeons act and you might just find yourself overstepping your role as a dog training instructor, where your expertise is accepted.
- Background knowledge ... look through the GCDS question paper as a guide to topics. This gives an outline of subjects expected of a handler working through the scheme to gold, so as an instructor in a guiding role, you would be expected to have sufficient knowledge to discuss each in relation to training and behaviour.
- Basic Obedience / Kennel Club's Good Citizen Dog Scheme and other schemes which promote control and reward responsible ownership ... This looks at the actual 'exercises', eg sit, walk nicely at your side, come back when called, response to name, games to play, and things we generally teach to help with life.
- Understanding and skill requirements for the Instructor / Advisor role - helping owners / carers relate to, train and control their dogs ... It is fairly easy to ensure handlers understand the reasons why they need to teach these things, but it is not so easy to understand the difference between training exercises and establishing a behaviour to enhance a relationship. As an instructor, you should consider the difference between the two as you could, with limited knowledge, make things worse for certain individuals. You should remember that you are now a training and behaviour enthusiast, with greater knowledge and skill, wanting to share what you now know. It is easy to excitedly flood people, giving lots of useful information and talking technicalities, but it can be a little more difficult to remember what it was like when you did not understand or could not actually see what your teachers are doing or even talking about.

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Suggested reading:

- Good Citizen Dog Scheme guidelines, copies downloadable from www.thekennelclub.org.uk
- The Dog Owner's Handbook – Annette Conn, gives an answer to many of those basic ownership questions
- Dog Training Instructors Manual – Angela White, gives a practical overview of the role of an instructor

Please note that the above books are only given as a suggestion and express the views of the author, there is a vast amount of information in the public domain, some highlighted through the popularity of TV personalities. It is confusing for dog owners, let alone those in the beginning of their instructing role.

LEGISLATION ... is a topic added to RDO for those with experience for the INTERMEDIATE AWARD

This has been included at Level 2 because, as a canine professional, you are building contact with a large number of owners and carers, in a position to ensure that they are not walking around in ignorance of the main laws that affect them. It will provide further knowledge to support the reasoning behind your teaching.

- Laws to protect dogs – cruelty / duty of care, welfare acts, veterinary surgeons act, sale of goods / livestock etc ... looking up and reading through these acts will help you understand your duty of care and the limitations on the advice you are able to give. It will also aid your ability to recognise signs of cruelty and neglect, and understand the processes involved in providing help or prosecution.
- Laws affecting dogs and ownership in society – Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, Dogs Act 1871, Environmental Protection Act 1990 etc ... understanding a bit about these laws will help you as you 'justify' the importance of what you are teaching. It is not your job to give your opinion, it is better to just state the law, even have a copy of the relevant paperwork at hand, so your clients can decide for themselves whether or not to comply.
- Byelaws and their enforcement – dog control orders, poop scoop, dogs on lead, dog exclusion areas, stray dogs, anti-social behaviour, noise abatement notices etc. This has become more varied and important over the last few years as government has given greater responsibility to individual councils to enforce and control aspects of ownership and environmental safety. Research in your area will allow you to guide your clients to local rules, spot fines, how to report nuisance, etc. For you, it should include contact with your local wardens, who may well be interested in your services for referrals.
- Laws effecting running a professional service – from health and safety to copyright. Traditionally, dog club services run on a 'voluntary' basis, but that should not imply 'amateur' ... whether you charge pennies or pounds, it is still a professional service and you have a duty of care. For everyone's sake, you need to ensure the environment is safe and suitable for use, you need to instruct in a safe manner and you should be aware of reactions and potential risks as a result of your instructions and advice. If you give out paperwork, you should be aware of copyright rules. You need to be aware of confidentiality and data protection rules for repeating and storing personal information on your clients. If you have joined a professional organisation, you are expected to adhere to the Codes of Practice you signed to agree, etc.
- Civil and criminal accountability – this looks at general knowledge, to ensure you know the difference between being sued and fined or being prosecuted and potentially landing in jail. You need to consider how this will affect you, controlling finances, your actions, your advice, the actions of your assistants and your clients, so please remember, for peace of mind, you really need to hold appropriate insurance.

Suggested reading and research:

- Dog Law fact sheets are produced by many canine organisations – the Kennel Club, RSPCA, Dogs Trust, Blue Cross, etc; and you are able to access information on websites through a search for 'Dog Law, UK'
- Shaw's The Dog Law Handbook, a loose-leaf reference text, regularly updated.

NB: Much of the introductory level is common sense and a natural part of dog-ownership, the intermediate adds relevant laws of which you should have a general understanding when teaching others. Note that:

- a) working towards PDTI theory certificates are a bonus, provided as an option, and you should be assured that they are separate and not a requirement of the practical course awards.
- b) Level 1 and 2 topics will be carried forward to be included in the questioning in the Level 3 Instructors Award, with the addition of 'learning theory' for a multi-choice and short answer paper, as for the Diploma.