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DON'T TRAIN YOUR DOG

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A Pet Parenting Guide
to Teaching Good Behavior,
Calming Fear, and Raising Happy Dogs

ANGIE WINTERS



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INTRODUCTION

There'll be no dinner tonight, at least none containing nutrients. But it won't be from a lack of trying. You were cooking a healthy yet delicious meal—the holy grail of family dinners—when your rogue pup hauled tail out of the kitchen like he was being chased by a groomer. He was late for his job biting the boys in the living room as they ripped a scene from *Lord of the Flies*.

Hopefully, it's just a nip like last time. It's not a real bite if his teeth don't break the skin, right? You enter the crime scene hoping the other parents will see it that way too. But ugh . . . this time one of the victims needs stitches! Before heading to the emergency room, you shove the little doe-eyed culprit into his crate. He sees it as a jail cell, but the last time you left him out he attacked your other dog. So, jail it is. On your way out the door, you toss processed cheese food and juice boxes to all the survivors. Bon appétit.

How does this stuff keep happening? Why does it seem like your dog jumped straight outta *Jumanji* and your neighbor's tiptoed straight outta Candy Land? You must have picked the wrong one from a rescue or responsible breeder, because you've read every dog training book on the planet. You've hired multiple trainers and tried medications, but you still have an aggressive, fearful, unhappy dog—and it's getting worse!

If this sounds familiar, you're far from alone. Whether your family consists of you and your dog or you're a member of the Brady Bunch, similar scenes are unfolding in homes all around the world. Like most caring parents, you've probably found yourself going back and forth between different dog training approaches and emotionally torn when it comes to teaching your dog. Too harsh and you'll cause fear and ag-

gression. Overly permissive and you'll end up the not-so-proud parent of a Tasmanian devil. Your partner insists on a certain method of dog training, but you've read that one is abusive. Your neighbor swears by the type she uses, but your other neighbor says it's bullshit. Your sister's friend has a coworker whose daughter's fiancé assures you there's only one right way to train a dog—and it ain't working.

It's no wonder you're virtually handcuffed by indecision. There's a daunting amount of noise and misinformation in the dog training realm. Proponents of different methods launch emotionally fueled attacks on each other, and families are getting caught in the crossfire. The resulting fear and confusion is rendering parents inert. Tragically, our dogs are paying a brutal price for this parental paralysis by analysis.

Even before COVID, the number of dogs suffering from severe behavioral issues has been skyrocketing. Now, add in the rash of pandemic puppies struggling disproportionately with separation anxiety and fear. Inconceivably, behavioral problems are now the number one cause of death in dogs under 3 years old.[1] Even our president's dog no longer lives at the White House with his family because he kept biting Secret Service members. Think about that. The president of the United States, with unlimited access to every dog training resource and trainer imaginable, hasn't been able to prevent or fix his dog's behavioral issues.

Dogs are being surrendered to rescues and shelters in record numbers, and even with thousands of dog rescue heroes working tirelessly, successful adoptions are far from guaranteed. The human and financial toll it takes to save, rehabilitate, and place just one dog is incalculable. As is the heartbreak when so many are returned to rescues suffering from dramatically increased separation anxiety or labeled "biters." In a study released by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, hospital stays related to dog bites increased 86 percent in a

1 American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, "*Puppy socialization position statement*," 2008, retrieved from www.AVSABonline.org.

sixteen-year period.[2] The senior researcher stated, "It's quite surprising and frankly we're at a loss to explain it."

I'm not surprised and I'm not at a loss to explain it. Never has our society put so much attention, money, and effort toward our dogs, so why aren't the number of behavioral issues dropping? Why are they doing the opposite? The answer is actually quite simple. Your "trained" dog is going off the rails because typical dog training does not work.

You read that correctly: *Typical dog training does not work.*

But wait, there's more. It not only doesn't work but also causes most of the behavioral issues to develop in the first place.

Mic drop.

The Fatal Flaw

Typical dog training is for teaching tricks. Sitting for a treat is a trick. A dog who's been taught to come around and *execute a perfect heel* to your left side is performing a glorified trick. Tricks for treats is fun! I've trained dogs for television, social media, and print ads. It's fascinating to watch a border collie weave through a person's legs, and what's cuter than a dog praying for his dinner? I get it. I love it, but that's classic animal conditioning. We're raising dogs in our busy homes as part of our families, not teaching tricks to dolphins in a pool. Typical training doesn't even scratch the surface of your dog's ability and understanding or what drives her. It doesn't fulfill your dog or make her feel calm when left alone. It can't teach her not to attack other dogs, bite people, or surf the counter for leftover bacon, and it definitely won't cure her fear of kids, hardwood floors, or the garbage truck. Typical training simply cannot teach dogs the skills needed for modern family life, and its failure causes dogs to lose their homes, families, and often their lives. This makes me—and parents whose dogs are struggling with

2 Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), "Statistical brief #101: Emergency department visits and inpatient stays involving dog bites," Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2008, retrieved from https://hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb101.jsp.

fear and aggression—unable to sleep at night. That's where this book comes in.

Anything and everything you want from your dog or for your dog relies on your ability to understand how dogs are entangled with us at an emotional level. For decades, I've helped dog parents get incredible results by understanding this. Unfortunately, the concept of dogs having sensitive and extensive emotions has long been dismissed as humans loving their dog to the point of anthropomorphizing. This overly generalized perspective and lack of scientific focus on the vital role emotions play in effective dog communication means the odds have been stacked against you and your dog all along.

To make matters worse, recent studies on how dogs learn and why they do what they do have produced inconsistent and contradictory results. One says your dog may love you but doesn't like the sight of your face.[3] Another says the opposite, that people and dogs look into each other's eyes as a sign of understanding and affection.[4]

Here's why the studies are producing contradictory results: The full scope of a dog's ability, personality, and emotions cannot be seen—and the vital skills needed for family life cannot be taught—in a laboratory, kennel, shelter, or group-training class. Those things can only happen in a family environment when they're connected to one or more people they trust and respect. Therein lies the problem. The reason you and your dog don't have the information needed for a safe and happy family life is because our society has been looking in the wrong places for it.

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3 Nora Bunford et al., "Comparative Brain Imaging Reveals Analogous and Divergent Patterns of Species and Face Sensitivity in Humans and Dogs," *The Journal of Neuroscience: The Official Journal of the Society for Neuroscience* 40, no. 43 (October 21, 2020): 8396–408, https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.2800-19.2020.

4 Anna Kis et al., "The Way Dogs (Canis familiaris) Look at Human Emotional Faces Is Modulated by Oxytocin. An Eye-Tracking Study," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 11 (October 31, 2017): 210, https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2017.00210; Miho Nagasaw et al., "Social Evolution. Oxytocin-Gaze Positive Loop and the Coevolution of Human-Dog Bonds," *Science* 348, no. 6232 (April 17, 2015): 333–36, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1261022.

A Different View

For over twenty-five years, I've been passionately studying and fixing *unfixable* dogs. It took only a short time of volunteering with dog rescues for me to become obsessed with the plight of our closest companions. After witnessing the epidemic of behavioral problems that dogs were developing—and our society's near inability to prevent or cure them—I was distraught. I knew there had to be answers! In a desperate attempt to find them, I started bringing home dogs that had been surrendered to shelters and rescues due to extreme behavioral issues—or to vets for euthanasia—after all attempts by trainers, behavioral experts, and medications had failed. Their emotional and psychological conditions were utterly heartbreaking. Many were survivors of puppy-mills or hoarding cases or were feral. With heroic help from my border collie, Hustle, the dogs taught me what they needed to recover—and it wasn't typical dog training.

Looking back now, it's clear how I came to see the root problems and to develop solutions. The dogs and their issues were all different (the variable), but my family home and parenting style was always the same (the control). By the second year and about thirty successful dog transformations, I had honed a set of communication techniques and approaches that consistently turned chronically troubled dogs into happy, polite family members, regardless of age, sex, breed, previous trauma, or internal wiring, and they were transforming in days or weeks . . . not months or years!

I began keeping detailed notes and capturing video while I continued learning from dogs, rehabbing them, raising puppies, and coaching parents to do the same. I kept records when doing home behavior consults, shelter assessments, and long-distance consulting for prison-dog training programs and rescues across the country. My specific skills are rare (this book's purpose is to change that), so I've had parents drive their dog from as far as California to my home in Ohio for rehabilitation. I've given presentations to rescues; spoken at dog festivals; done radio, television, and social media interviews; and written for national publications.

About a decade into my dog rehabilitation efforts, I was reaching many desperate dog parents and saving many dogs, but there are only twenty-four hours in a day. I could be in only one place at one time, and I was also raising two young kids. I knew I was only scratching the surface of an immense problem. I tried with every bit of energy I could muster, but I was beginning to run out of steam. I didn't know it then, but I was also running out of time.

For years, I had been battling trigeminal neuralgia, a devastating medical condition nicknamed "the suicide disease," while searching unsuccessfully for a cure. I fought desperately to stay alive for my boys, but eventually my body and mind could survive no longer. What I knew as my final hours were at first terrifying, then filled with acceptance and peace. I wasn't aware of the mind-spinning turn of events unfolding at that same time. Within twenty-four hours, I was rushed to Pittsburgh and underwent brain surgery by doctors I had never met, the top surgeons in the world for my condition. I awoke in a recovery room to the impossible. I was alive and completely cured—and profoundly struck by the full weight of Universal love and concern for dogs. I had no doubt why I'd been returned to this life. In that instant, I was transformed from a typical suburban mom into a woman with an unrelenting, singular purpose.

Sharing even this small version of my personal story is uncomfortable, but necessary because I want to assure you of a couple things: I'm not looking for fame and I'm not fucking around. The moment my eyes opened in that recovery room, I realized I had it all backward. All those years I thought I was saving dogs . . . but they were saving me! I knew I could never repay all they'd given me—all they give to humanity—but I'd spend my second life trying. Helping thousands of dogs and their families was no longer enough. I had to find a way to reach millions. In 2012, I founded the mission-driven company Parenting4Dogs (previously Angie4Dogs) and used the years of priceless dog documentation to create innovative video programs for raising awesome dogs, creating successful adoptions, ensuring great kid-dog relationships, and fixing fears and aggression. These video programs expanded my ability to help dog parents anywhere in the world, without needing to physically be present with their dog.

As my personal life and work with dogs has evolved over the years, I've listened to and analyzed all the wise and wonderful feedback from dog parents. I've continued to create new content to give them *all* the help they need. Now, with *Don't Train Your Dog*, I've brought my decades of dog work and massive amount of proprietary content together to create the ultimate dog parenting "bible." I've also included access to curated Video Demonstrations, Parenting Techniques and Tips, and additional content in the *Don't Train Your Dog* Digital Companion that enhances the parenting concepts described in the coming chapters. You already received access to the Digital Companion resources automatically when you purchased this book. You can view them at any time by using the QR code below:



parenting4dogs.com/digital-companion

With this, you have the opportunity to watch as I perform the methods discussed throughout this book in real-life family environments and situations. You can see the dog body language and techniques anytime, at your own pace. All people learn differently. If you prefer to use the written text only, please know this book is comprehensive and packed with all the dog parenting information you've been looking for. If you like visual aids to enhance your comprehension, you're covered there too. I personally feel that information presented through multiple communication forms creates a "superpowered" learning experience.

Rest assured, the parenting gold you'll learn truly works, and putting it to use in your own life is way easier than you think. There aren't just a few select humans who can understand, speak, or whisper to dogs. You can do it, too. There's no mystery or magic involved. Sure, some

of us are obsessed, more experienced, and sensitive to dogs, but you'll be right on our heels once you experience the *Don't Train Your Dog* difference.

The Don't Train Your Dog Difference

Typical dog training shows, videos, and books tend to water things down to make them look easy or more effective than they really are. I don't avoid or gloss over any important aspect of dog parenting. We're going to cover the good, the bad, and the ugly parts of life with dogs (except there really aren't any ugly parts with those cuties. I just wanted to use the phrase). Yes, some areas are more challenging or more subtle than others, but we're going to handle those *and clear up the confusion created by all that noise in the dog training world.*

First, a common source of confusion for dog parents is the view that people *who work with dogs* are one large group of people with similar skills. That isn't the case, and it's important you understand where my expertise lies. I specialize in communicating with dogs, understanding how they feel and view their environments, making them happy, and teaching them manners and safety rules. Let me put it this way: Nobody's ever going to mistake me for a groomer. Trying to trim my own bangs will have me staring at the little Dutch boy in the mirror for weeks. I'm not a vet and I don't want to be one. Sure, I'm an experienced dog mom, but if you ask me for advice on anything pertaining to the physical body of a dog, I'll have to pass. Need help training a dog for protection, law enforcement, search-and-rescue, hunting, agility, or therapy work? Pass, pass, and pass on all that. If you want me to name all 360 dog breeds or tell you who won Best in Show at Westminster last year, that's a *no* and a *hard no*.

Now, if you're a struggling dog parent, I got you! If you're a potential adoptive parent or rescue worker, I'm all over it. Maybe you just love dogs, want to understand them better, and your coworkers are going to lose it if you show them one more picture of your fur baby, up top! If you're a kindred spirit obsessed with helping dogs and want the ability to move them past fear and aggression and into happiness and good behavior . . . you picked up the right book, my dog-loving friend!

In part 1, I'll cover the human-dog symbiotic relationship and how this rare connection makes dogs physically and emotionally dependent on us. I'll explain why your dog needs you to drop the animal training mindset and communicate and teach from a parental perspective by using my simple guidance recipes (a set of techniques neither too harsh nor too permissive). We'll cover Doggie Rights and how fulfilling your dog enables you to focus on teaching the big stuff—the five most important Doggie Rules—and what small stuff not to sweat. We'll use those foundational dog parenting techniques to teach essential family-life skills, such as coming when you call, dropping stuff out of their mouth, how to walk on a leash, and ride politely in a car.

In part 2, you'll get my brilliantly simple recipes for creating great kid-dog relationships, perfecting no-stress potty time, and teaching your dog to find comfort in their crate, including effective techniques for addressing separation anxiety, whining, excessive barking . . . and much more. You'll find tools to easily and accurately diagnose levels of fear and aggression and brilliantly simple prescriptions for preventing and curing them.

Throughout, I've also included practical parenting tips you can use to round out and customize your parenting plan for success in all areas.

To ensure all your dog parenting light bulbs go on, this book is organized in a linear and semi-chronological fashion. Your first read should be cover to cover because with each chapter your parenting skills will deepen and expand, building upon the wisdom you gained in the chapters before it. You may find some information more useful in puppyhood and some may lean toward older dogs, but everything in this book applies to *all* dogs. I want to repeat that for clarity and emphasis: *All the parenting information and concepts in this book apply to all dogs, regardless of age, breed, sex, inherent wiring, or past experiences. Boom pow!*

> Dogs who cannot yet be touched by humans, such as feral dogs and those who've been victims of puppy mills and hoarders, need a few days of rehabilitation using my Healing Broken Spirits parenting module at parenting4dogs.com before you can start using the dog parenting techniques in this book.

The Bigger Picture

Aside from the dog lives that have been saved, I'm most honored to have the privilege of connecting with you. I choke back tears when parents approach me to say "I saw your website and it saved our dog. Then we showed our neighbors, and it saved their dog!" I can't describe how my heart fills when people email me to convey the relief and happiness gained after using the techniques I outline in this book . . . like the exhausted mom, crushed by grief and guilt after a failed adoption, finding the confidence to try again and the unmitigated joy of successfully adding a dog to her family. Or the frustrated dad who had previously "given up" on his dream of taking his dog to work and hiking together on weekends and turned it all around to begin living that dream just a few weeks later. I love hearing from rescues about their newfound ability to transform previously "unadoptable" dogs into adoptable ones since requiring parents to use my *Welcome Weekend* parenting guide . . . like Frankie, who leaped on dining room tables and ransacked living rooms when anyone attempted to leave the house, Molly who was surrendered for euthanasia after years of complete refusal to go potty outside or use a potty pad, and baby-faced Tucker who was too cute to bite any human or dog . . . except he did any chance he got.

I really want to add you to that list. To do that, we're going to need to rip off some Band-Aids so we can team up to advocate for your dog. First, don't wonder if the training you've tried in the past has caused damage. Drop any past guilt associated with your dog or previous dogs. Don't wonder what your dog may have gone through or try to figure out exactly what caused any undesirable behaviors. The only thing that matters in your dog's world is how to fix it. You must live in the now, as your dog does, as all dogs do.

Now, forget the dog training "commands" you know: *sit, off*, *heel*, and all that jazz. Clear the cache. Fully embrace your dog parenting role and step bravely into chapter 1. I'll meet you there, but I can wait a few minutes if you need to grab a cocktail or snuggle up with your pup first.

OK, let's begin.

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