

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING A "GROWL" CLASS

What to "look" for...

1. Trainers who rely on methods focusing on positive reinforcement through the use of treats, toys, petting and praise, rather than verbal or physical corrections.
2. Trainers who use equipment such as halters, harnesses, martingales and buckle collars. Equipment that causes pain, such as choke or prong collars, should not be used.
3. A training space large enough so each dog can feel relaxed in the presence of other dogs. An increase in stress will result in a decrease in learning.
4. Small classes not exceeding 6 students with a square footage of training area no smaller than 40' x 40'.
5. A high ratio between trainer and student. One trainer per three dogs, plus 1-2 assistants is recommended to increase success and safety.
6. Trainers who have exceptional coaching skills, and who treat both dogs and people with respect and compassion.
7. Students who are motivated, smiling and enjoying the training process. The class should not have the feel and appearance of a "boot camp". Speak to the students to see if they are satisfied with the course.
8. Trainers who will allow you to observe more than one training class before you enroll. If a trainer will not allow you to observe, don't enroll.
9. Classes that do not make guarantees. Behavioral outcomes and results cannot be guaranteed. Trainers should however set goals for success.
11. Classes where muzzles are not left on dogs for the entire hour. Dogs require muzzle breaks in order to pant and cool off due to the high arousal levels that these classes bring about.
12. Trainers with academic training in ethology and learning theory, as well as years of practical experience. Ask for professional references from certified veterinary behaviorists or applied animal behaviorists who are familiar with the educational knowledge base of the trainer. Teaching an aggressive dog class is not the same as teaching a basic obedience class and requires much more skill and knowledge.
13. Trainers with professional memberships in organizations as well as continuing education credits. Both are critical to keep current in the advances of behavior modification programs. Talk to the trainer about his/her continuing education programs.
14. A trainer with liability insurance since there is always a risk when working with aggressive dogs. Having insurance exhibits good business practices and care for the general public.
15. Off-lead sessions done with dogs muzzled. These sessions should be brief to avoid allowing the dogs to over heat or become so stressed that they can no longer function. The trainer should attempt to match dogs with a goal of having a positive interaction. Obviously, there is no guarantee that this will occur, but this should be the goal. The trainer should have equipment available to break up a fight if necessary.
16. Classes that don't allow any dog to "pick on or bully" another dog to the point where the victim cannot escape or shut the fight off, despite the victim showing good canine communication signals. The instructor should be aware of these signals and interrupt the interaction as quickly as possible.