



Obedience and your Malamute

The Alaskan Malamute can be a very independent and stubborn dog which often won't do anything without good reason. It is important that all Malamute owners obedience train and socialise their dogs from an early age for this reason, preferably with a reputable obedience club or organisation.

An untrained Malamute may be cute as a pup, but will soon turn into a large, energetic, uncontrollable, destructive dog if left undisciplined - hence the numerous phone calls the club receives from people wanting to "get rid" of their adult Malamutes. Often these people have not done their research into the breed or have not disciplined, socialised or obedience trained their dogs.

It is very important early in your dogs life to establish yourself, your family and any other human being as being higher in the pecking order than your dog. You must show your dog that you are the "pack-leader". This does not mean using physical punishment, but it does mean that you have to earn your Malamute's respect by being extremely firm and letting him know that you mean what you say. Once you have issued a command, don't let him get away with not doing what you have asked. Every time you let your Mal get his way you are undermining your authority and you will end up with a dog that thinks he's the boss, which can be unpleasant to live with when its a large, strong dog such as the Alaskan Malamute.

Obedience training, as well as teaching good manners and house rules, should start as soon as you get your puppy. If you would like help or advice about obedience training your Mal, please feel free to contact the AMCV Obedience Co-ordinator, or join in our obedience practice sessions at the Mally Workshops.

Some Basic Obedience Training Tips

- A dog is at its learning peak at 8 to 16 weeks of age, so start your obedience training as soon as you get your pup.
- If your puppy is too young to attend obedience class, buy an obedience training book and start your training at home.
- Keep your training lessons at home short, 5 - 10 minutes a session for a puppy and 15 - 20 minutes a session for an adult. You will achieve much more in several short sessions than you will in one long session.
- Give basic lessons in a quiet place with no distractions. After your dog has learnt the basic obedience commands you can introduce more distractions during your training sessions.
- Keep your training sessions regular when you are beginning with your pup - train at the same time and in the same place. Training before feeding time is a good idea.
- Wait until one command is learnt before trying to teach another. Once your dog has learnt a command, revise it at the beginning and end of each successive lesson.
- Keep training interesting and fun - always do your lessons in a different sequence. Dogs (especially Malamutes) easily get bored going over and over the same thing in the same order.
- Any sort of lessons or training sessions should be a happy time for you and your dog - if you are losing patience, stop the lesson. Make sure you finish up with an easy exercise so that you can end with praise for your dog. This will keep the dog enthusiastic and happy to work for you.
- Don't blame the dog for not doing what you are expecting it to, the handler is nearly always the one to blame.
- Get your dog's attention before giving a command and praise your dog when he looks at you for instructions - this shows your dog is listening and considers you the "pack-leader".
- When your dog reacts correctly always respond with positive feedback in the form of praise, a piece of food or a pat. Remember to show your dog that you are pleased when it has acted correctly - never take correct behaviour for granted, especially when training a young pup.

- Use a tone of voice suited to the message you are trying to get across to your dog - the dog interprets much of what you are saying by the tone of voice used. Saying "Good dog" in an angry voice (it sounds silly but you do hear it done) gives the wrong message to the dog.
- Do not allow or encourage behaviours in your pup that you won't want him doing when he is an adult. Behaviours such as mouthing, jumping up and pawing may be cute and tolerable when your Mal is a young pup, but can be dangerous, painful and frightening to other people when your dog is fully grown.
- Make sure that your actions are always telling the dog that you are the one in charge. You can remind your dog that you are the pack leader in many simple ways, for instance: the dog should be the last one through the door/gate, he should never be allowed to barge in first; you and your family must always eat first, then feed your Malamute - never feed him at the dinner table while you are eating; don't let the dog sit at your level on the couch or bed - the dog's place is on the floor. If your dog is misbehaving stand over him - don't crouch down to his level.
- When playing games don't let your Mal "call the shots". If you play tug of war games (which we advise you not to) always make sure you win, and never go and fetch the ball yourself. Keeping control over the games will reinforce your dominance in a way that your dog will recognise.
- Never handle your dog roughly or angrily, always be firm but gentle - remember, you must earn your dog's respect.
- If you have to guide your dog into the sit position, do so by pushing down on the dog's rump at the base of the tail, or guide the dog to drop by pushing downwards on the shoulders.
- A command is issued once only - if your dog hesitates to carry out your command, make your dog do as you have asked. By doing this you are actively showing the dog what it is to do when you issue that command.



Remember that when you go to obedience school with your dog, YOU are the one who will be receiving instruction on how to train your dog - the dog is not there to learn from the instructor. For this reason obedience classes usually last for about an hour - your dog may not have such a long concentration span (especially a puppy) but the handler should!

So, if you aren't having much success with your obedience training, don't blame the obedience club or the dog - you will almost certainly be the one making training mistakes. Ask your instructor for positive feedback on your training technique if you can't work out where you are going wrong.

You are always welcome to bring your dog along to AMCV events and obedience practice sessions, or ask us about a particular problem you are having with your Malamute. We also recommend any of the Dogs Victoria affiliated Obedience Clubs - details are available from the Dogs Victoria website at www.dogsvictoria.org.au. These clubs are inexpensive, are well equipped and have a number of instructors to help you with any problems you may have.