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Introduction

Popular opinion is that Alaskan Malamutes, known the world over as sled dogs, are one of the hardest breeds of dogs to train. Malamutes have a hard earned reputation for being extremely intelligent yet intensely stubborn, which can cause a good bit of difficulty for an inexperienced or unprepared trainer. Despite the difficulty of training a Malamute, it can be done, and chances are it will be easier than you think. While you are training your Malamute, just remember that you have to train yourself as well. Trying to train your dog without the patience and time required does neither you nor your Malamute any favors. You should also make sure that you have the necessary tools and materials to train your dog. Without many of these tools, the training process can become much more stressful and problematic.

Recommended tools and materials:

•Appropriate sized leash

•Appropriate sized collar or harness - If your dog is too big for your comfort or is exceptionally gifted at slipping out of his collar a harness will probably be your best bet.

•Treats to reinforce good behavior

•Toys – Much like treats, toys can be used to reinforce good behavior. The more time you spend playing with your malamute, the more likely it will put up less of a fight during training sessions.

•Correction collar (optional) - also known as a choke collar, this collar is used to help leash train a dog.

•Pee pads (optional) - These pads are most often used to train dogs to use the bathroom on the pad instead of somewhere else in the house. This type of training is most useful for dogs that are inside for long periods of time or dogs that are extremely small.

•Crate or Kennel (optional) – You only need one of these if you plan on crate training your dog.

Types of Training

The various types of training include potty training, house training, crate training, socialization training, behavioral training, command training, obedience training and performance training. The different types of dog training can all be separated into three different groups based on difficulty and the stage of the dog's development in which the training should take place. The three groups of training are basic, intermediate, and advanced, all three of which will vary in difficulty and length depending on the type of dog you have, the amount of training time available and the effort you put into the training.

Basic Training

Obviously, basic training will be the first group of training you introduce to your new Malamute. Even if you have just taken possession of a Malamute that is older and has already been through basic training it is a good idea to go back through the different types of training in this level so that your new dog will have a chance to get used to your style of command and training.

Potty Training – Although potty training is not the most important type of training a malamute can get, it is definitely essential.

Potty training tips for your Malamute:

-Don't start too early, and be patient. It's not easy to potty train a puppy, and if you start before the puppy is ready, both of you may soon become frustrated with the process. As far as being patient goes, Malamutes generally require a bit more time to potty train than other dogs, so you should be prepared to stick it out for the long haul if necessary.

-Set a schedule and stick to it. Since puppies have such small bladders they need to use the bathroom quite regularly. If you set a schedule you can train both yourself to remember to let the puppy out and you can train the puppy to know that it should use the potty outside.

-Block off any area your Malamute likes to use the bathroom in. By denying them access to the area they think is the "bathroom area" you will force them to pick a new area. With the right guidance that new area can be outside.

-Keep an eye on your Malamute. This one may sound simple but it is the only way to ensure that your dog doesn't have an accident on the floor. If you let your puppy wander around the house without you, he/she will have plenty of time to use the bathroom without your knowing it.

-Do not put down newspaper in an area where your Malamute likes to use the bathroom. If you put newspaper or any other material down you automatically resign yourself to letting the dog use that part of the house to do its business. Putting newspaper or a pee pad down also reinforces the idea for your Malamute that using the bathroom inside is ok, which it is most definitely not.

House Training – House training is often used synonymously with potty training but in reality although house training does include potty training, it can best be described as training your dog how to act and behave within your home.

House training tips for your Malamute:

-Start Early. Unlike potty training, house training can begin the day you bring your Malamute home. If you teach your Malamute pup what it is and is not allowed to do as a puppy you will have less problems with your dog as it gets older. Sure it may be cute to let the adorable ball of fur sit in your lap or lay on the furniture while it is a small puppy but as it gets bigger and starts to chew on things it won't be so cute anymore, and by then it will be nearly impossible to completely correct this behavior.

-Do not let your Malamute on any furniture or beds. Allowing your Malamute to sit on the same furniture as you will make it extremely difficult for you to occupy the Alpha role in the house. By sitting on the same furniture as you, a Malamute will see itself as being your equal, and if you do not occupy the dominate with this incredibly smart breed of dog, proper training will be next to impossible.

-Make sure that your Malamute knows that everything in your home is yours, even the dog toys. By applying your dominance over both you and your Malamute's possessions, your Malamute will be less likely to feel as if it can chew on things throughout the house. You can do this by taking a toy away from your Malamute while it is playing and make them sit or lie down before you give it back to them.

-Do not let your Malamute mark his territory in your home. While it is inevitable that your new Malamute will have a few accidents in the house, you should immediately clean the urine up and use stain remover and strong scented cleaner to remove the stain completely and cover up the smell of urine. Chances are you will only have this problem if you take an adult Malamute into your home and it tries to claim the territory as its own. If you allow your Malamute to mark its territory within your home it will be extremely hard for you to maintain alpha status.

Crate Training – Many people shy away from crate training because they think that it is inhumane to keep a dog in a crate. In reality, crate training is one of the best things you can do for your Malamute. It will give your dog a place of its own within the confines of your Alpha territory. Malamutes tend to be extremely close with their owner so a crate can also help with separation anxiety should you have to leave for any period of time. Crate training your dog also comes in handy during other types of basic and intermediate training because you can use the crate for both positive and negative reinforcement.

Crate training tips for your Malamute:

-Do not use the crate as punishment until your Malamute has been fully crate trained. If you are trying to crate train your pup and you begin to use the crate as punishment, your dog will begin to associate the crate with punishment and negative feelings, making crate training much more difficult.

-If you plan on crate training your Malamute, start as early as possible and follow through. If you get your Malamute used to the crate when it is a pup it will be much easier to crate train than if you wait until your dog is grown. Training your Malamute at a young age will also help in potty training and house training because Malamutes, like most dogs, will not use the bathroom where they sleep.

-Do not put the crate in a part of the house that is not occupied. If the family spends most of the time on the second floor and you have your pup's crate on the first floor, your Malamute may feel like it has been abandoned when it is put in the crate. If you put the crate in a room with high traffic, your pup will view the crate as a pleasurable place to be and will not feel like he is separated from everyone else.

-Make the crate a safe and fun place to be for your Malamute. You can do this by leaving a toy or two and a comfortable blanket in the crate with your Malamute. The more comfortable your Malamute feels in the crate, the less of a hassle you will have in the crate training process.

-Leave the crate open as much as possible in the early stages of crate training. Crate training is all about making your Malamute feel comfortable being in the crate so if you leave it open as much as possible, your pup will have more time to get used to the crate without feeling trapped.

Socialization Training – Socialization training is extremely important for any dog, but especially for Malamutes. Malamutes are smarter and more energetic than many other dog breeds so it is especially important that they understand how to be social around dogs and humans. Socialization is especially important if you don't have other dogs or kids in the house. The more interaction Malamutes get with other dogs and children the better they will be in social situations.

Socialization training tips for your Malamute:

-Do not let your Malamute display any sort of aggression toward you or your children without punishment. Malamutes are typically the most aggressive while they are eating, so that would be a good place to start. While your Malamute is eating, slowly reach your hand down towards the bowl. If it snaps or growls at you remove the bowl and try again later. This type of aggression training is especially important for Malamutes that live in homes with small children because small children will be the ones most likely to invade a Malamute's space while it is eating. Eventually you should be able to put your hand in front of your Malamute's face or take food from your dog's dish while it is eating. This process is all part of establishing Alpha dominance over your dog and letting it know that the food in its bowl belongs to you.

-Socialize with other dogs as often as possible. Taking your Malamute to a dog park or some other neutral environment that also has dogs is a good way to let them get used to other dogs in a comfortable setting. You should avoid taking your Malamute to any environment where another dog will feel territorial, such as a house of a friend that has dogs. Because Malamutes are highly energetic, they are often mistakenly believed to be dog aggressive, but that simply is not the case. If you have problems with

your Malamute being too energetic or rowdy with other dogs do your best to tire it out a bit before introducing it to new dogs.

-Initially, keep your Malamute on a leash around other dogs and people. By keeping your Malamute on a leash when it first meets new dogs or people, you can maintain control over the situation and quickly curb any unwanted behavior such as growling or snapping. Let your dog get used to the other dogs before you let it off of the leash to play. If your Malamute is exhibiting aggressive behavior do not let it off the leash as this will reinforce the previous bad behavior.

-Think about enrolling your pup in a puppy Kindergarten. Puppy kindergarten is a great way for your Malamute pup to socialize with people and other dogs its age. Another benefit of puppy kindergarten is that whoever is running it likely has years of experience and will be able to spot a problem before it surfaces.

Alpha Training – Alpha training can best be described as training your dog to recognize you as the dominate authority in the house, or in other words, as the Alpha male of the house. As you Alpha train your Malamute, you can also work in other types of training, especially as you train your dog how to behave in the house. Malamutes are considered special needs dogs when it comes to training so establishing the Alpha dominance over your dog should make everything run much smoother.

Alpha training tips for your Malamute:

-Start on day 1, and never stop. For many people, establishing the Alpha bond with their Malamute is the easy part, it's maintaining the Alpha position that proves to be hard. As you get more comfortable with your Malamute and he starts to become part of your family it will be less natural for you to maintain Alpha status. You may start to let you Malamute sleep on the furniture or sit in the kitchen and whine for scraps while your family is eating, all of which is behavior that you did not allow before. Malamutes are extremely smart, and they will constantly test your boundaries so you have to keep your guard up and hold your ground. Do not allow your Malamute to do things that it knows it is not allowed to do because it shows weakness on your part and a lack of structure that the Malamute will be all too grateful to take advantage of.

-Ensure that your Malamute knows that every other person in the house is above it in the pack hierarchy as well. Training your dog to recognize you as dominant is one thing, but training it to recognize other people as dominant is a whole new ballgame. Unlike most other types of training, Alpha training needs to be done with the entire family as much as possible, so that your Malamute will not be confused as to its place within your home. If your Malamute does not recognize its place at the bottom of the "pack", it will continuously try to assert its dominance over other members of your family, especially children.

-Integrate Alpha training with other types of training as much as possible. Think of it as sending your dog a subliminal message through training. The more you reinforce your alpha status through other types of training, the less chance your Malamute will have to directly challenge that status. Most people find it next to impossible to train their Malamute without holding Alpha status so it is usually one of the first things new Malamute owners try to teach their pets.

-Take obedience classes with your pet. Not only are you trying to train your Malamute to recognize you as the pack leader, but you also have to train yourself to act as a pack leader. If you try to teach your dog something that you are not reinforcing, your lessons will fall on deaf ears. An obedience class teaches you not only how to get your dog to obey you but it also teaches you how to act like the pack leader in all situations.

Intermediate Training

Intermediate training essentially takes what your dog has already learned and builds upon it and reinforces it. For the most part, intermediate training ties into the Alpha training that you have already given your Malamute. If you have not yet established Alpha dominance over your Malamute, focus on this before starting with Intermediate training. All three types of intermediate training can and should be introduced to your dog at the Basic training level. Intermediate can be extremely stressful so you should be prepared to be patient with your Malamute so that you do not lose your cool. Although it may be tempting, you should never use physical punishment in any aspect of Malamute training.

Command Training – Getting your Malamute to listen to your verbal and physical commands can be extremely difficult if you don't go about it the

right way. By this stage you should have already taught your dog different commands that aid in other types of training, such as come, sit, stay, and possibly heel if you already have your Malamute leash trained. Command training is all about teaching your Malamute the commands you may issue and what it should do when you issue them.

Command training tips for your Malamute:

-Reward your dog when it obeys one of your commands. Teaching your Malamute basic commands can be one of the easiest parts of training. If you show your dog that it gets a tasty treat when it correctly obeys your command, it will be much more responsive to the learning process.

-Spread it out. Malamutes get bored with training very fast and if they are uninterested in what you are trying to teach them, you will be wasting your time. Try to teach your Malamute no more than one new command a day, while actively reinforcing other commands that it previously learned. Although teaching a command can take as little as five minutes, you should try to reinforce that command as often as possible. Before you teach your Malamute a new command, run it through other commands it already knows. Your Malamute will be more receptive to this process if it know it will get a treat at the end of training, but do not give it too many treats. Dogs that are overly rewarded for performing certain actions such as sit or stay may begin to only obey those commands if you have a treat in hand.

-Help your dog associate an action with a command. It's not enough to say sit and hope your dog will get the meaning of the order; you have to actively show them what you want them to do. If you want your dog to associate sitting with the order to "sit", you have to put him/her into the sitting position yourself. When you say "sit", place your hand on the dog's rear and gently push down until the dog sits. This will help him associate an action with a command.

-Use physical commands such as hand gestures whenever possible. When we teach a dog a voice command, it doesn't necessarily respond to the command but rather the tone of voice. If you plan on teaching your dogs many different commands, try to use physical signals or cues whenever possible, such as a finger snap or an open palm hand gesture. Using physical commands will lessen the chance that your Malamute will get confused during training and it also helps you hide your emotions during the training

process. If your dog sees that you are excited or angry, it will respond to those emotions in a predictable manner.

Behavioral Training - This is the type of training used to correct unwanted behaviors of your Malamute, such as chewing on things other than chew toys, begging for food at the dinner table, digging outside or jumping on people when they come into your home. Behavioral training is almost a mix of command training and obedience training because you have to teach your Malamute to obey a command in order to curb certain behaviors.

Behavioral training tips for your Malamute:

-Do not use physical punishment to rid your Malamute of unwanted behaviors. Malamutes are very smart and they do not respond well to physical violence. If you use physical force it may cause your Malamute to become more aggressive around humans, which is exactly the opposite of what you are trying to teach your dog.

-Use your voice. Tone of voice can be a great substitute for physical punishment. Malamutes are extremely close to their family and if you use a deep tone of voice when you issue an order, your Malamute will associate that order with disappointment and will be more cautious about repeating such behavior in the future.

-Provide your dog with a substitute. Many of a Malamute's behavioral problems stem from a lack of stimulation or proper toys. Chewing can be an incredibly annoying habit for your dog to have, but if it sits inside all day with nothing to do what can you expect? More often than not a few toys, and especially a chew toy if the pup is teething, can go a long way to kick this habit. If you have a Malamute that likes to dig, it could be because it has a surplus of energy and not enough room to expel it all. Try taking your Malamute for a run to tire it out before you put it outside for any significant period of time. Also make sure there are plenty of toys for it to play with outside, as the more distractions it has the better.

-Do not allow your Malamute to whine or beg for anything, especially food. If a Malamute whines for food from the table and your family gives it to him/her, you are telling your Malamute that it is ok to whine. If your Malamute insists on begging or whining for food put it in its crate or in another room, out of sight of the dinner table. Do this as often as necessary

for your Malamute to realize that whining and begging for food is not something you or your family will tolerate.

Obedience Training – Teaching your dog different commands is only part of the battle of intermediate training. Teaching your Malamute to obey the commands once issued is an entirely different monster. Essentially, obedience training is all of the other types of training mixed together. Your Malamute must recognize your word as law and must obey you no matter what the situation. In reality obedience training is never really finished and you must continually reinforce it as long as you have your dog. If you fail to use positive reinforcement for the things your Malamute does right and negative reinforcement for the things it does wrong, then your Malamute will continuously try to test your limits. Obedience training is especially necessary because Malamutes grow so big and strong. If you allow your Malamute to grow into an adult without obedience training, you are asking for more trouble than you can handle.

Obedience training tips for your Malamute:

-Use positive reinforcement whenever possible. If you see your Malamute doing something it was trained to do, such as sitting by your side instead of chasing an animal or small child at the park, you should reward that behavior. Positive reinforcement can come in the form of a delicious treat or even an appreciative pat on the head. If you let your Malamute know that positive behavior is rewarded, it will be more likely to obey you when you issue a command.

-Train your Malamute on a leash. Leash training your dog is one of the hardest but most effective types of obedience training. If you train your Malamute on a leash, it tells your dog that you are in control and that you are the dominant pack leader.

-Teach your Malamute to respect you. Much like children, Malamutes will only listen to you and obey you if they respect you. You may think of your Malamute as your friend, but in reality you need to think of your Malamute as a dependent, just like a child. You can't be best friends with your kids, so why would you expect to be best friend with your Malamute? Like kids, Malamutes also are predisposed to challenge your authority. If you let your Malamute challenge your authority, it will not respect you.

-Do not repeat commands and do not allow your Malamute to ignore you. You should expect your Malamute to obey you first time, every time. Not only will this help a Malamute accept you as pack leader but it can also keep them out of harm's way if they are about to run into a busy road or engage that nasty Pit-bull down the street. When you issue a command to your Malamute give it a few seconds to obey and if it doesn't respond to your command, you can respond for it. If you tell your Malamute to sit but it doesn't, put it into a sitting position yourself. If you tell your Malamute to stay but it doesn't, you can put it back in the same exact position and try again.

Advanced Training

Malamutes are bred as work dogs, and because of that they tend to have a lot of energy and like to stay active. That energy and need for activity can cause endless problems around the house unless you give your Malamute an outlet for that energy. As with the intermediate training, you should ensure that your Malamute effectively grasps the previous levels of training before moving on to the advanced training.

Performance Training – You don't necessarily have to train your Malamute to pull a sled, but teaching it how to perform some sort of other physical task is a great idea, even if it is something as simple as catching a Frisbee. Performance training gives your Malamute something to put its endless supply of energy and attention into so that it will cause fewer problems around the house. Performance training can also be a great way for you and your Malamute to bond together as you both train to accomplish a certain task.

Performance training tips for your Malamute:

-Condition yourself and your Malamute before you engage in performance training. Depending on the type of activity you decide to take up, you will have to make sure that you and your dog are physically ready for the challenge. Your Malamute should be at least six months old before you begin any strenuous physical activity.

-Pick an activity that is conducive to your schedule and physical limits. If you can't put a significant amount of time into performance training, it is better to choose a casual activity such as Frisbee that you can engage in on a casual basis.

-Do not engage in an activity that you will not be able to follow through on. If you begin to train your Malamute to engage in weight lifting or sled pulling but do not follow through, it can be extremely detrimental to any further training.

-Like with other types of training, use treats to reward good performance. Carry a pocketful of treats with you while you are performance training and occasionally reward your dog for doing things right.

-Positive reinforcement only. Unlike other types of training, you should not use negative reinforcement, also known as punishment, to get what you want. If your Malamute is having a hard time during performance training, you need to try to keep a positive attitude and do not become irritable or angry. If you use negative reinforcement during performance training, your Malamute will be much less excited to engage in performance training in the future.

Conclusion: Good Luck with Your New Malamute!

There is no doubt that Malamutes can be extremely difficult to train, but if you stick with it and stay positive, what you can teach your dog is almost limitless. Malamutes make excellent family dogs and are especially good around children. Remember that your Malamute is extremely intelligent and stubborn and should be dealt with and trained accordingly. As long as you maintain alpha male dominance over your Malamute, its training should go relatively smoothly.