

Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

Episode 016 Transcript – 5 Tips You Need To Know Before You Hire a Trainer

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-16/>

Welcome to another episode of the Fixing Separation Anxiety podcast. Now, if you're ready to get your dog over separation anxiety, but you feel like you don't quite know where to start, then you might be considering getting a trainer. In this week's episode of the podcast, I'm going to give you my top tips for finding the right trainer for you and for your dog.

Separation anxiety training isn't easy, but it does have a high success rate. With the right methods, lots of time, and plenty of patience, there's a really good chance that you can get your dog over separation anxiety. So that's good news, right? Well, if you're gearing up to do this on your own, as lots of people do, then you might want to head over and join my separation anxiety support group over on Facebook. In the group you'll find a ton of advice, training tips, support and every week I go live to the group and you can put questions to me about your dog. Now if you want to join the group, just go to this link www.subthresholdtraining.com/group. But meanwhile, if you are looking for help in the form of a trainer, I want to share with you my top tips. Why? Well, it's a really big decision. You're going to be spending your hard-earned cash on a trainer, and of course you're going to be investing time. So it's a decision that you really do want to get right. So anyway, here's my list of top five tips to help you choose your trainer.

Tip number one, be aware. Now, dog training is an unregulated profession. And that basically means that anyone can call themselves a dog trainer. Yep, anyone. You don't need to have qualifications, you don't need to be certified, you don't have to sign up with a professional body. You can just call yourself a dog trainer, get yourself some business cards, put dog trainer on the card, and hey, presto you're a dog trainer. There are zero requirements for education or accreditation. Isn't that shocking? Hairdressing is a more standardized industry than dog training. Now, hopefully it won't always be like that. Hopefully one day we'll start to see in different countries around the world, more standardization, more requirements for accreditation and consistent education. But in the meantime, just know that it's not like that. So not all dog trainers are equal. Anyone, as I said, can call themselves a trainer. Anyone can call themselves a dog behaviorist too, and they don't have to explain to you what the difference is. And the difference between a trainer and a behaviorist is really murky. So there are courses, there are training courses where people come out and have a certification in behavior and there are vet behaviorists, which is a very vet behaviorist. Is a very different thing from a dog behaviorist. But anyone can call themselves a dog behaviorist, just as anyone can call themselves a dog trainer. So don't be fooled by titles either. Just because somebody calls themselves a dog behaviorist doesn't mean to say that they have studied the theory, the law, and the application of animal behavior. And I warn you about all of this because I want you to choose wisely. Like I said, it's your dog, your money, and you deserve to know what you're signing up for.

Number two. Tip number two choose force-free. Even though dog training is unregulated, there are increasingly standards in ethics of the training approach that more and more trainers are using. More and more trainers are adhering to an approach to training which is humane and which is backed by science and evidence. And we know that training that involves punishment or pain is much less effective than force free training. So not only is that sort of training inhumane, not only is it cruel to dogs, but studies show again and again, over and over, that that sort of training is not as effective as force free training, which is great news for us as dog owners and trainers, and it's great news for our dogs. It's really good that we know what works and even better that what works to train dogs is humane and it's kind. So like I say when I say no, that's not just me thinking that force free training is better. I'm talking about reputable, independent studies that consistently show that this is the best approach to use to train your dog. Now, it's especially important to choose force free training when you're working with a dog who has fear or anxiety, separation anxiety. Dogs already have a ton of fear and panic and anxiety to deal with as it is. And so do you, right? And you just can't fix fear with fear-based training methods. It doesn't make any sense, does it? There's just no logic to that. Now, back in the day with kids, with children, we would take the approach that we would discipline children who were fearful. So, for example, a child who was too fearful to go to the dentist, who would scream, who would kick off when they were going to the dentist maybe once upon a time, back in the day, we would punish that child. We would punish the child for not doing what we wanted. But now we know that's not how we get frightened children to do things we want them to do. We need to make children feel safer and feel better about things that scare them. Same with dogs. Maybe once upon a time when we didn't know better, that was the only approach that we knew. But now we do know better. And we know that we cannot fix fear with fear. Not only does it not work, it risks making our dogs worse. So if you use fear based, punishment based methods on fearful dogs, you risk making their fear significantly worse. So with a home alone dog, remember that what we're trying to do is to make them feel better about being home alone. That's how we get them over their separation anxiety. And what we're not trying to do is suppress the signs of fear and panic. With cruel methods, there's no point as just trying to punish out the behaviors if those behaviors, the behaviors, the problem behaviors that our dogs display when they're at home, if those behaviors come from fear and anxiety, we cannot punish the fear out of our dogs. We need to make them feel happier about being home alone. And that's when the behavior changes. So make sure that when you pick a trainer, you know that they are using force-free, up to date, science-backed methods. Just ask them about it. I think you'll find that trainers who do use modern science-based methods are more than happy to tell you exactly how they approach training. So ask them the question.

Okay, tip number three. I want you to pick a specialist separation anxiety trainer. Separation anxiety is one of the most if you ask a trainer, a trainer would say separation anxiety is one of the most complex behavioral conditions that trainers deal with. And in fact, lots of trainers don't take these cases on. By the way, when I say trainer, I also want you to think behaviorist too. Not vet behaviorist. But if you are speaking to somebody who calls themselves a dog behaviorist, as I said earlier, just remember that's just a title. Essentially, a trainer and behaviorist are interchangeable or can be. So forget the title. Instead, focus on what the trainer or behaviorist knows about modifying behavior in dogs, okay? So they need to have studied the science of

behavior change in dogs. If they haven't, they shouldn't be calling themselves a behaviorist. All right? So you need to get to the bottom of that when you ask your questions. But anyway, coming back to picking a specialist separation anxiety trainer, like I said, lots of trainers don't take these cases on because they find them too difficult. And when you do find a trainer or dog behaviorist that takes on separation anxiety, they still might not be a specialist in separation anxiety. And I know I'm biased, but I see the best results being delivered by people who specialize in separation anxiety, and I want that for you. So just as you wouldn't consider fixing a bipolar disorder by having regular appointments with your family doctor, in the same way, don't work with a generalist trainer if you want to address separation anxiety. It's just too specialized a condition. It's difficult, and it requires a ton of knowledge about the syndrome. Okay?

So find someone who really knows it. Make sure that the trainer or behaviorist that you pick has taken on tons and tons of separation anxiety cases. There are a few of us, not many, there are a few of us who work solely with separation anxiety cases. And of course what that means is we've got experience with hundreds of different separation anxiety scenarios. And that really makes a difference because there are always bumps in the road with separation anxiety training and you need someone who really knows what to do in every given situation. So find someone who specializes in this. And a sign that your separation anxiety trainer knows separation anxiety, really knows how to treat it, is that they won't come to your house. I know that sounds weird, doesn't it? Sounds really OD. Don't trainers typically come to your house or you go to their facility, go to puppy class in their wherever they're hosting the class, so you go and see them or they come to your house. So why am I saying a sign that your trainer knows separation anxiety is when they say we don't come to you? Well, no, the thing is, trainers who really know separation anxiety work remotely. That's because if we are in the house with your dog, if we come to an appointment, if we're in the house with you, we can't see how your dog is doing when he's home alone because we are there. Yet maybe we could do what we used to do in the past. We could go and stand outside and look through letter boxes and peek through curtains. But it doesn't make sense and it's not a realistic assessment of what's going on with your home alone dog. So a really credible separation anxiety trainer is going to use video technology. They'll use the video technology to assess the severity of a dog's anxiety. And once they've done that assessment, they're going to work with you remotely to do all the training. Why? Because being there is not a realistic scenario. So your trainer needs to take themselves physically out of the equation and coach you remotely on the training. Now, if your trainer doesn't work remotely, that's a big red flag. And ask your trainer about working online and any good separation anxiety trainer will know that there's actually research which shows that this is a really effective way of training. So ask them about that.

Okay, number four, I want you to ask great questions. I have hired dog trainers in the past, so before I was a dog trainer myself, I hired dog trainers. So I've been through this process and studies show that owners this is really interesting, I don't exactly know why, but studies show that owners tend not to shop around for dog trainers. Maybe you just go on the first recommendation that you've been given or the name that pops up first on a Google search. But for whatever reason, we don't tend to shop around for dog trainers. And I know I was certainly

the same, but now I know what I know about the profession and the industry I would do things very differently if I ever had to go through the process myself, which I kind of don't because now I'm a trainer and I know tons of trainers anyway. But for you, if I were in your shoes today, here's what I would ask. So I want you to ask them what their qualifications are and I want them to be really clear and upfront and then you can go and check out those qualifications. You want to make sure that their qualifications are up to date and that they have recently undertaken either the qualification itself or some update to it. And also ask them how they keep up to date with their knowledge, their skills and their learning, because a good trainer is going to keep researching and learning and keep their skills and knowledge up to date. And then I want you to ask them about what training methods they use. This is kind of a trick question because if you're going to find if you're going to work with a specialized separation anxiety trainer, there is only one answer to this question. In fact, any trainer, no matter whether they're specialized or not, should only be using one approach to treat separation anxiety, and that is gradual desensitization. They might say gradual exposure, they might say systematic desensitization, but it's the same method. So if your trainer isn't using that method, which is where we gradually get your dog used to being home alone by training in very small increments, going at the dog's pace and so on, if that's not what they're doing, then they're not training properly. So this is going to be a really interesting one. And so how many cases have you worked with? I want to know that people have done this over and over and over again.

Another question I mentioned earlier, do you come to my house and then the next question is really important for hiring any professional is can I talk to clients that you've worked with about what they've achieved? Now, most trainers are probably going to recommend people who have had success with training. Separation anxiety does have a really high success rate, but it doesn't always. So bear in mind that frankly, most trainers, and I would probably do the same, are going to recommend you two people who've had great success. But I would also ask your trainer, what about cases that didn't get resolved? What happened there? You need to know what their approach would be for cases that didn't get resolved because they do exist. All right, next question. Do you offer a money back guarantee? Okay, so if your trainer is saying to you that if your dog doesn't get over separation anxiety, whether they're putting a time frame on that, whether they're not, if your trainer tells you that they do offer a money back guarantee, huge red flag because we cannot guarantee behavior change. So my worry is when trainers are offering a money back guarantee. My worry there is there's a really good chance that they're using punishment. Okay, so you're going to say, so does that mean punishment is really successful? No, it doesn't. What it means is that punishment based training can suppress behaviors and it can especially suppress behaviors in the short term. So you might find that your punishment based trainer, your fear based trainer can produce and I'm going to use air quotes here, results, but only because your dog is suppressing its fear based behavior, not because your dog feels more comfortable about being home alone. And typically then what happens over time is those behaviors come back and they come back with a force because your dog is even more fearful about being home alone. So if somebody's saying that they can offer you a money back guarantee on separation anxiety, no, they can't. Now, actually, I do on my online programs, I do offer a money back guarantee. So am I being hypocritical? Am I contradicting myself? The thing is, I am very clear about my money back guarantee. I say that I don't guarantee a change in

your dog's behavior. I am really proud of my online programs. I think they're high quality and I put a ton of effort into not only the online materials, but working with people who take my online program. So I guarantee the quality of what I do, but not the results. So if a trainer is offering that, I think that's excellent. And actually I think that's where we should go to as a profession, that we should stand by our training methods even if we can't guarantee results.

Number five, I want you to trust your gut instinct. Now, numbers one to four have been very logical and very methodical. And here I am saying trust your gut. It's just that when you're making a buying decision on anything, if you ever have that kind of uneasy, kind of suspicious or uncomfortable feeling, then you know it's probably not the right buying decision, don't you? You just get that sense. And I would say the same is exactly true here. So if you feel at all uncomfortable, if you've got a little voice inside your head saying, nah, this doesn't seem right, then move on. Move on to interview the next trainer on your list because frankly, there's a ton of us around. There's plenty of great trainers around. So if the trainer that you're talking to just doesn't seem right, if something doesn't pass the smell test, then move on. There's just no need to work with a trainer who's not up to the job because there are so many who are.

Okay, those are my top five tips. So if you do want to work with a trainer, do your due diligence because it's a big decision and it's a big investment. I hope this helps you pick the right trainer for you. And of course, if you want to work with me, either one to one or in my online group program, the one I mentioned earlier, then just hop over to my website. Or you can find out more information via my Facebook page. I've linked to all of these in my show notes, but my website, in case you don't know, is www.subthresholdtraining.com.

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