



# TIPS 'N' TAILS

PRESENTED BY BARK BUSTERS HOME DOG TRAINING

## A Boy's Best Friend

Article contributed by Bark Busters Richard and Vicki Horowitz

They say dog is a man's best friend—at least, that was how Patricia and Kevin Zibluk felt when they decided that a purebred Airedale terrier was just the friend their teenage son, John, needed. In fifth grade, John was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, a developmental disorder that often results in problems with socialization and communication, making it difficult to make and keep friends. In John's case, it also brought on anxiety and difficulty dealing with new environments.



Richard and Vicki Horowitz with John and Rex

Growing up, Patricia's best friend was an Airedale, a breed known for its courage, intelligence, loyalty and sometimes, stubbornness and fixation—a characteristic similar to the repetitive, single-minded behaviors that Asperger's can cause.

Although John and his Airedale, Rex, quickly formed a close bond, Rex's lack of basic obedience and issues such as barking in public places and bolting outside (sometimes through doors he opened himself) meant that John couldn't take Rex everywhere he wanted. "Airedales want to please. Rex just didn't know what John wanted," Patricia said. "Now, he does."

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### SPEAK DOG

To read our blog, visit [www.SpeakDogBlog.com](http://www.SpeakDogBlog.com). Here you'll find plenty of resources that promote clear and open communication between people and their dogs. By teaching owners to

"speak dog," we hope to reduce the possibility of maltreatment, abandonment and euthanasia of dogs everywhere. Readers will find commentary from Bark Busters CEO and Grand Master Dog Behavioral Therapist Liam Crowe; stories from Bark Busters' trainers across America; helpful information from guest experts; and thoughts from our spunky Bark Busters Training Academy mascot, Lily.

## A Senior's Guide to Selecting and Owning a Dog

All of us have the opportunity to enjoy the unconditional love a companion dog offers. This is especially true for senior citizens, as they typically have the time available to nurture and develop a strong, emotional human-canine bond.

Dogs can make ideal companions for senior citizens, as they provide loyalty, joy and unconditional love. Dogs are totally accepting of their elderly owners. They don't see any wrinkles or physical limitations. Instead, they only see someone to love and someone who loves them back.

A dog's devoted and affectionate nature can make a senior owner happier and even healthier. Medical professionals who work with seniors have long noted the benefits a pet can provide in the life of an elderly person.

### Stepping Up to Dog Ownership

Not just seniors, but people of all ages need to understand that caring for a pet comes with responsibilities, commitment and time, as well as physical and financial requirements.

If you wish to bring a companion dog into your life, you need to be able to meet the dog's basic needs for food, exercise, entertainment, safety and shelter. He also requires veterinary

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In October 2008, the Zibluks called in Bark Busters trainers Richard and Vicki Horowitz, who were especially suited to help Rex and John, given Vicki's 25 years of experience as a school-based occupational therapist.

Initially, Richard and Vicki worked with John and his parents. "We addressed John's high anxiety level by focusing on his voice tones and body language, reminding John to be relaxed when working with Rex," said Vicki. "We worked at a slower pace so as not to overwhelm him."

Once John became more comfortable with Bark Busters' methods and with Richard and Vicki, he began to enjoy the training and ask questions independently. "My dog used to treat me as a peer," John said. "Now he treats me as his master and friend."

Two years after the initial training, the Horowitzes continue to provide support to John and his parents as new issues arise—and John's bond with Rex continues

to grow. Now, John is able to take Rex to restaurants and other public places, where Rex helps him relax by standing between John and strangers. John's friends from school come to his house to enjoy Rex as well. Through John's hard work, leadership and relationship with Rex, he has been able to teach Rex an escape route from his bedroom window onto the roof, so in case of an emergency, the two can help each other through it. They've even been featured on Animal Planet.

"John's relationship with his friends has improved as a result of a better-behaved Rex. John is much more confident in himself and his ability to teach his 'friend' Rex," Richard said. "Rex and John are both calmer and much happier."

As a result of their success with John and Rex, Richard and Vicki have been asked to help an 8-year-old with Asperger's and his Jack Russell mix. "We, as Bark Busters, are confident and eager to help improve the human-canine bond with all family members, including those with special needs," Vicki and Richard said. 🐾

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care and grooming—brushing and coat care, bathing, nail trimming and dental care. If you are not able to provide some aspect of these care basics, know whom to ask for help, whether a family member, friend or professional.

This is particularly true with regard to exercise. If you are unable to walk a dog frequently, consider exercise options such as teaching the dog to play fetch or practicing obedience. There are also plenty of dog walkers for hire who can take your dog for a stroll or romp. If you choose a very small dog, he may get enough exercise just running around the house.

Whether or not your dog stays mainly indoors, be sure he always wears identification. Affix ID tags to his collar and ask your veterinarian about getting the dog microchipped, which is a permanent form of ID that will help ensure he will be returned to you if he becomes lost.

If you or a senior you know are seriously considering getting a dog, you need to ask these questions:

- Can you financially afford to keep a dog?
- Can you physically care for a dog?



Research different breeds to find one that best reflects your personal lifestyle

**Tips for Selecting a Dog**

While you may be enamored with a particular dog breed, choose an individual dog for his personality and other characteristics, not because of his breed alone. Opt for a dog that matches your particular lifestyle and abilities. Size and temperament are the most frequently cited factors that matter most when selecting a dog for a senior. Other qualities may also be important; for example, an allergy sufferer may want to consider how much the dog sheds before making a selection. The guidelines below will help you make a thoughtful decision when selecting a canine companion.

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### Choose an Appropriate Size

For practical reasons, smaller breeds tend to be more suitable for elderly people (except, perhaps, for the over-exuberant terrier breeds). A small dog is simply easier to handle, which means:

- You can transport the dog in a pet carrier to take him to the vet or on plane trips.
- You can bathe the dog in a sink, and not have to stoop over a tub.
- Your canine companion will fit comfortably in your lap, if you so desire.
- You will need less food, which reduces cost and also means you'll have less waste to pick up.
- You will enjoy (typically) more manageable walks and other outdoor adventures.

### Temperament Matters, Too

Also of importance in choosing a dog is temperament. A dog's temperament is his personality, the inherent characteristics that make him unique among others. Temperament is due to a number of factors, from breed and age to external influences such as how well the dog was socialized as a puppy, how he has been treated by people, etc.

In general, most seniors seek a dog known to be affectionate, companionable and even-tempered. The ideal dog will also be friendly and sociable to other dogs and people of all ages.

Another factor to consider is the dog's trainability, or his willingness to please you, to whom he looks for leadership, safety and affection.

Whatever the dog's temperament, understanding how to manage his behavior through proper training will ensure a more companionable relationship between you and your canine pal.

### Training Assures Your Safety

Training is essential to helping a senior remain safe around his or her pet and ensures the dog's safety as well. As pack animals, dogs naturally need a leader in their lives. If they don't find one, they will try to become the leader, which can create numerous behavioral problems. Thus, the human in the home needs to be the pack leader. To become the leader, you must practice obedience, set rules and apply them consistently, and praise your dog's good behavior.



Affectionate, companionable and even-tempered dogs make ideal pets for seniors

A good place to start training is by teaching your dog to follow you—for example, through doors, into the car and on stairways. When your dog is behind you, you not only decrease the chances of tripping over him; it also teaches good manners, which form the basis for effective training.

### A Socialized Dog is a Happy Dog

A well socialized dog is comfortable meeting and being with others, including dogs, other pets, and people of all ages. He has been introduced to a variety of situations and yet knows he and his pack have remained safe through them all. An insecure dog, on the other hand, may become a fear biter. Because he does not know how to act when he encounters someone new, his defensive reaction is to bite. This dangerous behavioral pattern can be addressed with training.

Dogs are typically protective of elderly owners because of their emotional bonds to them and because they may see these people as weaker members of the pack. A dog's deeply rooted sense of loyalty will drive him to protect his owner. No matter the size or breed, if a dog feels threatened, he may demonstrate aggressive behavior and even bite.

Your dog needs to learn to feel comfortable with all visitors to the home, from family members and neighbors to your housecleaner or building janitor.

If you require assistance from a personal caregiver or home health care provider, your dog must learn to understand that this stranger will not harm you. Should you voice discomfort or flinch when a health care provider

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treats you, the dog may perceive that the caregiver is hurting you. Be sure to reassure your dog that you are OK. Allowing your dog to continue this misperception can contribute to aggressiveness to all visitors.

The chaos created by young visitors like grandchildren will inherently raise the energy level in the house, bringing new stress to the dog. Here are some ways to control such situations.

- If your dog begins to bark or nip at visitors, remove him from the area and place him in his safe crate or on his pillow.
- Have children of school age drop a piece of food near the dog. The dog will see this as a friendly gesture and will know the child is not to be feared.
- With very young children, parents need to remain vigilant to monitor their youngster's interactions with the dog and teach them to treat the dog with respect and gentleness.
- Never invite a child to feed the dog by hand—this teaches the dog it is acceptable to take any food from a child. Because of a child's small size, the dog may view the child as an equal, and thus may try to take advantage of the situation.
- Never leave a young child and any dog alone together. This is when most dog bites to children occur.

### Bringing Home Your New Dog

Prepare to have ready the things your dog will need from the start. An ideal supply list includes ID tags, a collar and six-foot leash, food and water bowls, dog food, dog toys, a crate and bedding, and basic grooming tools.

You will also need to pet-proof the home to ensure your dog will be safe in his new environment.

Within the first week, take your dog to a veterinarian for a health check and necessary vaccinations. Arrange for the dog's spay/neuter surgery, if needed. Your vet can make recommendations regarding your pet's food, exercise needs and other care tips to help you get started on the right paw with your new pal.

### Happy Dog = Happy You

Consistent training and leadership go a long way toward ensuring a happy dog. By treating your dog with a balance of understanding, discipline and affection, you will be richly rewarded with a loyal, grateful and loving companion in the years ahead.

Humans and canines can share a very special bond that's unique between different species. Dogs can make ideal companions for people of all ages—especially seniors. Just be sure to take the time to make an informed decision about the age and type of dog you choose as your furry friend. 🐾

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