

Back to school: Exploring the reasons why adopters do not plan to take their recently adopted dog to training classes.

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Attending dog training classes has been associated with improved dog trainability and an increase in engagement in shared activities with the owner which may strengthen the dog-owner bond.

Dogs Trust, a UK based dog welfare charity, recommends that new owners of dogs adopted from rehoming centres attend a bespoke training course (Dogs Trust Dog School; DTDS), where suitable. However, a proportion of referred owners do not attend classes. Here we investigated reasons for non-attendance and compared these with potential dog-related risk factors including the age and sex of the adopted dog.

Data were collected from 7,099 post-adoption call surveys completed by owners 2-weeks after rehoming a dog from 20 UK Dogs Trust rehoming centres. Of these, 3,515 (49.5%) owners were recommended to attend DTDS, of which 1,818 (51.7%) reported that they did not attend and/or were not planning to attend a class. The most commonly reported reasons were that the adopter was an experienced trainer and/or would prefer to train the dog themselves ('experienced owner'; 419/1818, 23%) and the dog didn't need training, was already trained and/or well behaved ('training not needed', 307/1818, 17%). Chi-square tests were used to explore the association between these reasons and both the age and sex of the dog. Dog age was categorised as: puppy (0 to <6months), juvenile (6 to <12 months), young adult (1 to <2 years), mature adult (2 to <7 years), senior adult (7-11 years) and geriatric (12+ years).

'Experienced owner' and 'training not needed' reasons were both more likely to be reported as age of the dog at the time of adoption increased ($P=0.001$ and $P<0.001$, respectively). There was no evidence of an association between dog sex and either of these two reasons for not attending and/or not planning to attend a class.

Adopters of older dogs may have perceived their dog as being already well trained/behaved compared to adopters of younger dogs. However, dog training classes can be beneficial to dogs of all ages, for stimulation and enrichment, dog-owner bonding and for preventative behaviour advice. More research is needed to understand why adopters, especially of older dogs chose not to attend training classes and how attendance rates could be increased.