

UNDERSTANDING AUSSIES



**THE
HAPPY AUSSIE**

LET'S TALK AUSSIES!

Understanding your herding dog and training them in a breed-specific way will not only help you have a better relationship with your dog but will ensure you are providing what your dog needs and in turn, give you a more fulfilled, relaxed and happy and healthy Aussie.



The Australian Shepherd



Their Intelligence



Physical Exercise



Herding Instinct



Over Arousal



Strong Willed



Stranger Danger



Training Tips

THEIR INTELLIGENCE

Australian Shepherds are amazing dogs, but they can be quite the handful to the unsuspecting person. It is easy to be charmed and fall in love with them for their good looks and image of the intelligent, alert, trainable dog. They need help from you to become that dog.

They are indeed one of the most intelligent breeds (in human terms of intelligence) because they have been bred to work with and cooperate with humans just as all other herding dogs. This makes them easier to train as they are quick learners who have eagerness and endurance to work.

However, this intelligence also makes them more challenging than many other breeds. They thrive on getting to use their wits and enjoy problem solving and being active. If we don't provide them with anything to do then - you may have witnessed it already - they will find something to do that we might not like. Digging, barking, chewing on everything you love and herding family members are just some of the behaviors we see in bored Aussies.

So, the best thing you can do for your Aussie is train, train, train and give them a job!



PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Aussies need more physical exercise than the average dog to thrive and be healthy (they run up to 50 miles a day when working with livestock). You might have heard the saying "A tired dog is a good dog." This is true in many cases, although there are some caveats to consider. It is important for your dog to have the right kind of exercise and to have a combination of physical and mental exercise. Physical exercise alone will just turn your dog into an athlete (read: a super-fit energetic Aussie). Giving them a good mental outlet will create that 'good-tired' we want from our dogs.

Ideally Aussies should get at least 60 minutes of aerobic exercise a day. Yes, that means more than a leisurely walk around the block. There are lots of activities that you can do to get your dog those 60 minutes!

Here are some ideas:

- Play Aussie-friendly fetch (more on that below)
- Play with a [flirt pole](#)
- Play scent games in the yard (amazing physical and mental workout)
- Train them to run on a treadmill
- Go running with them
- Go biking with them (use a bike attachment like the [Walky Dog Plus](#) or the [Springer Dog Exerciser](#))
- If you have a pool-teach them how to swim
- Set up an obstacle course for them or do agility

Young Aussie pups should not do anything too strenuous until about a year of age or when fully grown and mature. Doing too much too early can damage their joints and bone structure. Consult with your vet for recommendations on age-appropriate exercise.

HERDING INSTINCT

In addition to their intelligence, they possess a strong instinct to herd. Yet most of us did not bring an Australian Shepherd into our home because of their herding skills and our need for a livestock dog. You will still see herding behaviors without any livestock around. You might recognize typical herding behaviors such as chasing kids that are running or trying to stop family members from splitting up during a walk. After all, the Aussie wants to keep everyone together. Herding is really an instinct to control movement and to keep everyone in one spot where they can supervise you. Essentially, Aussies are both movement-police and hoarders in one.

Depending on your Aussie's breeding and heritage, their herding drive may be strong or mild so their display of the behavior will differ. It can range from simple guiding behavior where they cut you off, stand in the way, or otherwise try to have a 'say' in where you go. To nipping at running heels, barking anxiously at bikes or cars going by and becoming grumpy when their game of ball chase is interrupted by another dog. Herding dogs are not born knowing the difference between sheep and cars and they don't naturally understand that most dogs at the dog park don't want to be herded and 'policed'. It is up to us to teach our Aussies acceptable behavior and self-control around moving people, animals and objects.



OVER AROUSAL & FRUSTRATION

Herding dogs often have low frustration thresholds. Due to their instincts they are usually keenly aware of any movement happening in their surroundings and can get frustrated when they can't control it. Frustration will often show itself as barking or repetitive behaviors such as spinning. It can also show up as a dog going from a relaxed state of mind to wound up and hard to calm down again or general restlessness and hyperactivity.

One way that we often accidentally build frustration and trigger over arousal is by how we play with our dogs. Fetch is a popular game that many dogs, including Aussies enjoy. But, if we look at what they were bred to do, we see that the movement of the ball triggers our little control freaks. Aussies have a strong need to stop the movement of the ball. Having to repetitively chase something that keeps 'running away' can build up frustration in herding breeds and they can become unhealthily obsessive about it (which is why having them chase laser pointers can result in OCD behaviors).

The part of fetch they really enjoy is the catch. The moment they stop the movement, that is where they get their endorphin high. That is the game that we should be playing more of. The easiest way to do this is to bounce the ball right next to you and your pup so they can catch it out of the air without all that running. You can toss it to them, you can even still play traditional fetch, but remember the best part is the catch, so using a chuck it to throw the ball as far as you can should not be the goal when playing with herders. Instead, we just give them more opportunities to catch the ball which is the best part of the game and avoids 'the stressful' part of fetch.

STRONG WILLED

Aussies are the most versatile of the herding dogs. While some breeds are specialized to move one type of livestock such as border collies who exclusively work with sheep, Aussies can work with anything from poultry to sheep to cattle. Large, strong cattle that they move and herd with their attitude, agile speed and confidence.

So, it is no surprise that this breed can be 'pushy' in some ways and is not afraid to try and get what they want and have it their way. Especially if you haven't taught them a better way yet. I often hear Aussie parents describe their dog as stubborn, but that is an emotion we have no evidence of in dogs and more of a human label. Instead, we do know that Aussies were bred to have standoffs with 2000 lb animals and not give in until that animal moved aside for them. Not only are they assertive and head strong but Aussies will stay focused on a task for much longer than many other breeds. If a bull doesn't move, they don't just give up and walk away, they problem solve and do what they must to finish the job.

Living with an Aussie you've probably seen many examples of their persistence and might have an Aussie who 'demands' attention, begs for some of your food or waits patiently below the tree the squirrel ran up. This means when they learn bad habits that work for them, they can be very persistent and take a lot of effort to undo. Prevention of bad behavior is your best bet!



STRANGER DANGER

Finally, Aussies tend to be wary of strangers and people not in their inner circle so continued socialization is key with this breed to prevent reactivity, barking, or fearful or aggressive responses to people.

Most Aussies go through a fear period in their development around 6-8 months of age and this is the time that a social, happy go lucky puppy might suddenly become suspicious and vocal about strangers. It is important during this time not to push them into social interactions but continue their socialization and do lots of people-watching at a distance so there is no pressure on them and they can have a safe and positive experience seeing people. Hang out with your puppy at a park and give them treats as strangers walk by and especially as people get closer.



AUSSIE TRAINING TIPS

1. First and foremost-TRAIN. Anything. Whether obedience, tricks, agility, or scent work, give your Aussie that mental stimulation they need!
2. Work on impulse control exercises around movement to teach your Aussie not to chase kids, cars, bikes, cats or anything else you don't want them to chase. A flirt pole is a great tool for this!
3. Play games with less chasing and more catching, herding or even tugging behaviors.
4. Integrate training into your daily routine and have your pup 'work' for their food, toys and other valuable resources by doing a behavior or two for you before you feed them, clip the leash on or play with them.
5. Get professional help if your Aussie has undesirable behaviors you need assistance with. You can find certified trainers in your area at CCPDT.com or do online training with us at the Happy Aussie!





Understanding your Australian Shepherd is the first step of getting closer to the lifestyle you WANT with your dog. Remember that you don't have to do all the training right away, but making some changes and adding Aussie-specific training is a great start to your dog's well-being and education. Being a part of our Happy Aussie community also means you get the gift of support from us and fellow dog parents.

We are excited to help you and your dog have the best possible life together.



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