

Steffi Trott ([03:18](#)):

Alright, so let's go on to today's episode. In today's episode I will discuss training two dogs, specifically training two dogs who do not want to be separated or who are both working on the same skill. If you are listening to this and you only have one dog and you are about to switch off the episode because it does not apply to you, I would still encourage you to listen because what we will talk about is important for any dog that you may add to your family in the future. In fact, the biggest troubles occur in multi dog families who were not properly prepared to manage their dogs.

([04:06](#)):

So if you have more than one dog, you can use the advice in this episode as an actionable plan to put into practice right now. Or if you currently only have one dog, then you should use what we will discuss as a foundation for the future when you may want to add another dog, because it's much better to know these things now and do them right from the start, when you add a second dog, then to run into troubles down the road.

([04:35](#)):

A lot of owners who have two or more dogs ask us, can I train both of them at once? And I understand where this idea generally comes from. Humans can very well be taught skills in the setting where there's one teacher and many learners. That is how every part of our educational system works. As early as preschool, we have one teacher and several students and it stays like this through elementary school, middle school, high school, college. Even when you are learning skills as an adult, they will often be taught in group settings such as, for example, a dog training class where we have one instructor and several families attending.

([05:22](#)):

So if this works so well for us humans, then it should work to teach multiple dogs at once, right? But the answer is no, it does not. Because dogs learn differently from humans. In a group class setting, the teacher can explain something to an entire class and every student will listen and understand. Also, in absence of direct interaction with the teacher. Dogs however, do not learn like this. They learn through direct interaction and feedback from us. That is the only way that we can teach them.

([06:00](#)):

We cannot just show something to a group of dogs and have them repeat it. We have to teach each individual dog by closely observing them, reinforcing them for good choices and manipulating the environment to make these choices likely and each individual dog will need a slightly different approach for that.

([06:23](#)):

Two dogs can learn the same skill at different speeds because they may excel at different parts of the training and need extra help with others. One dog may be able to advance the skill faster while the other one needs to work long on foundations. One dog might be more pushy and bold and need to work more on impulse control while the other needs more confidence and drive building.

([06:50](#)):

It's our task as the trainer to be the teacher our dog needs and to help them learn the best. Each training session is a conversation between you and your dog in which you carefully observe what they can already do. You think about what modifications and feedback they need to better understand what you're teaching them, and then you make small adjustments that will gradually teach them the final behavior. Now, if you're interested in what exactly I mean by "feedback" at how to advance behaviors, check out Episode 53 where I explained in detail how to slowly build up behaviors and how to help dogs understand what we want.

([07:38](#)):

Once more, a training session is a really involved back and forth between you and your dog. You need to watch them with your full attention and be very observant and able to adjust to what they can do well and cannot do well, which once more will be unique to each dog. You can already see where I'm going with this. It's not possible to teach a behavior to two dogs at the same time. You have to focus on the dog in front of you completely, or the training will not be as effective.

[\(08:11\)](#):

And to be honest, I will tell you I think it is unfair to attempt to teach two dogs at once. Because we ask them to pay full attention to us and try their hardest. But if we are training two dogs at once, half of the time we're not even focusing on each individual. I have yet to ever see anyone do as good a job at training two dogs at once as they do at training one dog. If you try to train two dogs at once, you will miss critical signs both positive and negative.

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You might miss one of your dogs doing really well while you're looking at the other one and you miss reinforcing them, or you might miss one of your dogs breaking criteria while you're looking at the other one, and you miss having to reset them or maybe make the task easier. Plus in most cases, there is a dynamic between two dogs when one is the bold one and one is the laid back one and the bold one will always be trying to get the most of your attention while the other one more or less politely stands back.

[\(09:22\)](#):

That is not fair to your dogs, that is not effective training. They deserve your full attention. You might wonder what about dogs that wait their turn? If your dogs can truly wait their turn, then of course, absolutely yes, they can be present while you train another dog. But in this case, I would still argue that you are training one dog while the other is waiting because the waiting dog is just waiting by themselves without your interaction and you're giving your full attention to the dog that is working.

[\(09:56\)](#):

I want you to be honest with yourself though regarding whether your dogs can actually wait their turn. In about 80% of cases when dog owners tell me their dogs can wait their turn and then I ask them for a training video or I observe it in person, the waiting dog actually gets up and wanders around and is sent back to their station and gets up again, and that is not being able to wait their turn. If you are trying to train one dog while the other one is leaving their position, then you are once again in the situation where you have to teach two different things to two dogs and you will fail and it's not fair to the dogs.

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You can teach dogs to wait their turn as a skill in itself, and I actually have a whole online class about this. My own dogs do wait their turns. You can see this in many training videos and I can absolutely teach you how to train that skill, but if your dogs are not currently able to do this, you need to separate them for training and work on waiting turns as a behavior in itself.

[\(11:11\)](#):

Speaking of separation, that brings me to another topic. Dogs that cannot be separated. It's not uncommon that two dogs bond quite closely to one another, and this seems to happen, especially if at least one of the dogs is younger when they first meet. These dogs are then so attached that separating them is a real struggle. They whine and cry and cannot focus without the other one around. If you have two dogs that are this attached to one another, I highly recommend that you make it your top training priority to help them detach a bit because this will become a big problem down the road.

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On the one hand, it will interfere with any training plans you have. Like we discussed, it is impossible to be a good trainer to two dogs at the same time. Each one needs your full focus and attention. Additionally, some behaviors are actually worse when two dogs are together, such as reactivity. In bonded pairs often

there was originally one reactive dog, then the other one fed off this and also became reactive, and now these dogs are always on walk together and always reacting to the same triggers and increasing each other's reactivity.

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Once more, it's not possible for one person to adequately train two dogs at once. If you have two reactive dogs, that cannot be apart. Your first training step needs to be working on separating them. It'll be the prerequisite for any training you do. On the other hand, apart from the training implications, one day your bonded pair will have to be apart also for non-training reasons.

[\(13:08\)](#):

Maybe one of them just needs to get a dental at the vet or some other procedure. Maybe you have an emergency you need to take care of and they have to be watched by different relatives, or who knows? It's going to be very, very stressful for your dogs to have this sudden unprepared separation. I would argue that it is our responsibility to prepare our dogs for what we just cannot avoid, which is that one day they will have to be apart from each other, even if it's just for a few hours

[\(13:45\)](#):

In many cases, this first forced separation occurs in some unforeseen and already stressful situation. Let's say your dog step into something on their walk and they cut their paw and need to stay at the vet for the day to take care of it. Imagine how stressful this will be for your dog if they are dealing with the additional difficulty of the separation anxiety. It's our task to make sure this will not be a huge emotional drama for them. So please take this seriously.

[\(14:17\)](#):

If you're listening right now and you have two dogs that cannot be apart, start working on this today. Your dogs will be much happier after you address this and it will make future training possible. So how do we work on this? I like to start with small separations inside the house.

[\(14:38\)](#):

For example, you could put a baby gate between your bedroom and the hallway, have a dog on either side, and then give them something nice to chew. I would make this a daily ritual, something that is actually really pleasant and positive for the dogs. Give them a bully stick or a frozen lick mat with wet food or a rubber chew toy that you filled with something really delicious. Your dog should see that baby gate going up and get real happy because they know good things will happen.

[\(15:12\)](#):

These small daily separations should be really fun and positive for them. After you have done this for a week or two, and they are fine, try to have them in different parts of the house. For example, one dog in the bedroom, one dog in the living room, each one with their tasty evening chew. Once they're fine with this, experiment with leaving the house with one dog while the other has their chew, just open the front door, step outside with one dog for a minute and reward them out there. Step back inside, while the other one is chewing inside.

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You could put on some background music if you think that the dog that stays home will be worried when they hear the front door and you keep working like this with a little bit of separation each day, so you get to a point where you can train them separately and walk them separately and have them be apart without drama.

[\(16:08\)](#):

Once more. If you are confused about how to advance this skill or how to break it down, check out Episode 53 where I go in detail about how to properly break skills down into small, manageable chunks

for teaching. These daily separations might seem contrived because you do not need to separate your dogs every evening for the chew, but it's exactly what we need to help the dogs get used to short positive times of being apart.

[\(16:37\)](#):

Back in 2020, at the height of Covid, I actually recommended this to all puppy owners. A lot of people got puppies or young dogs at the beginning of Covid and of course during the first months, many people were at home 24/7 and those dogs were always with their humans, but we knew that one day the Covid puppies would have to be left home alone. So we had to start practicing this as early as possible.

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I did not want the puppies to turn 10 months old and never having been left alone, suddenly the owner had to go back to work and it was a huge thing. So I had my Covid puppy owners practice leaving their puppies for half an hour or one hour every day. Of course, in Covid, there wasn't even that many things you could do in this time. So a lot of my puppy owners ended up just going for a walk by themselves or just sitting in the backyard by themselves. But it was really important for them to create these short positive separations and show the dogs this is just part of life. It not bad. It is not scary. This can happen and you can relax. It is totally fine.

[\(17:54\)](#):

So if you have two dogs that cannot be separated, start working on these separations now, not next week, not next month. Definitely not only when there's an external need for them to be separated, such as a stay at the vet. Remember, it's our responsibility to ensure our dogs can handle different situations and the situation of being apart from another dog is absolutely one of these cases we need to prepare them for because it will become necessary at some point, whether for training or other reasons.