

Are You a Good Citizen? Is Your Dog?

By Dianna Stearns, CPDT-KA, CDBC

What are the standards that constitute a good citizen? We Americans like to debate rules and regulations, there's no doubt of that. If one thing is proposed as a good idea, another idea will pop up immediately in opposition. Americans are defined by our populations' diversity, our wide range of freedoms and philosophies and our sometimes contentious character.

Americans usually do agree on what a well-behaved dog needs to be: a dog that doesn't jump up on people, greets strangers or another dog and owner peacefully, walks nicely through a crowd without pulling on the leash, comes immediately when called and sits and stays in place when asked to do so.

Could your dog walk through the Capitol Hill Peoples' Fair without stealing a hot dog out of a nearby child's hand? If he's an American Kennel Club (AKC) Canine Good Citizen® (CGC) your answer would be yes!

Based on the most common challenges all dog owners face, the Canine Good Citizen program was created in 1989 to reward dogs who have good manners at home and in the community. The program consists of two parts that stress responsible pet ownership for owners and basic good manners for their dogs. The program incorporates a training curriculum and a standardized test for common behavioral challenges.

Dogs of all breeds, mixes and ages can participate. CGC training aids in establishing a baseline for proper socialization and a great foundation for future training for dog sports or obedience. Puppies can participate in CGC training too after they've had all their proper vaccinations. If the puppy passes, the AKC recommends retesting as an adult, since temperament and behavior can change over time. The tests are given by certified AKC CGC evaluators and dogs who pass this 10-step test receive a certificate from the American Kennel Club.

According to the AKC, "Dogs who have a solid obedience education are a joy to live with. They respond well to household routines, have good manners in the presence of people and other dogs and they fully enjoy the company of the owner who took the time to provide training, intellectual stimulation and a high quality of life."

Most organizations that train and utilize dogs in therapy situations such as work in schools, libraries, hospitals and nursing homes, require those dogs to have their CGC in place before participating in their certification programs. An additional benefit to having your dog earn a CGC, is that many homeowners' insurance companies and rental organizations offer discounts to policy holders and tenants whose dogs have earned the designation.

So, what's on the CGC test?

The following is a list of requirements for CGC certification:

- Can your dog accept a friendly stranger?



Photo courtesy of American Kennel Club

- If someone the dog doesn't know walks up to you on the street to talk, can your dog remain calmly seated at your side?
- If that stranger asks to pet your dog, can he remain calm while the stranger touches him?
- If that stranger were a veterinarian, a vet tech or a groomer, would your dog allow that stranger to lift his legs, touch his feet, look at his teeth and ears or brush his coat and tail?
- When you go out on a walk, are you in control? Can your dog walk near you on a slack leash looking to you for direction and then turning left or right and stopping when you stop?
- Could your dog walk calmly through a crowd (which might include adults and children), some who might be moving quickly and some who might be standing still?
- In an emergency, or simply when asked, can your dog sit and lie down on a verbal cue like "sit" and stay in that position until you release him?
- Will your dog come to you reliably when called from a distance of 10 feet?
- If another friendly stranger with their dog walking on a leash should approach you and your dog, can your dog remain calm sitting or standing at your side while you and the stranger have a short conversation?
- Would your dog remain calm if something noisy or unexpected occurred five feet away from him? This could be something as simple as someone approaching you on crutches or opening an umbrella, or a nearby sound distraction like a car horn.
- In an emergency, or if you were out on an errand where dogs aren't allowed, would your dog remain calm for three minutes if his leash were being held by a stranger?

Pretty impressive, wouldn't you agree? This presents a standard of good behavior that all dog owners should aspire to meet. If you'd like your dog to accomplish all these tasks, seek out an AKC Canine Good Citizen class and an AKC evaluator in your area. Visit the AKC's website www.akc.org to find a certified CGC evaluator holding classes and testing in your area.

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