



The Playful Pooch Program



A canine-assisted play therapy program of the
Family Enhancement & Play Therapy Center

Risë VanFleet, Ph.D., President

Finding the Right Dog Trainer

Whether you plan to involve your dog in therapy work or not, you care about your companion canine. You want your dog to be happy and healthy and to enjoy being with you as much as you enjoy being with him or her. There are many myths and controversies swirling around the subject of dog training these days, and it can be confusing. Even dog training television personalities have very different theories and approaches, and not all of them are accurate or good no matter how well they are packaged.

I am a proponent of positive dog training. We no longer need unpleasant equipment or invasive or punishing procedures to force our dogs to do as we wish. The so-called dominance and pack-leader theories are based on inaccurate information, even about wolves, and they are no longer considered viable by canine biologists, behaviorists, and researchers. At www.playfulpooch.org, under Resources, there are links to full information on this topic. The truth is, dogs need our benevolent leadership (provided in non-forceful ways), and they also need our love, friendship, caring, and perhaps most of all, our understanding. That understanding needs to come from the dogs themselves! While dogs share some characteristics, they are also unique beings that need to be treated as such!

Did you know that dogs communicate with us all the time? I have lived with dogs my entire life, and I really thought I understood them, but my eyes were opened to the contrary several years ago. Once I began understanding canine communication signals (there are many good resources on this topic), I began to see my dogs in an entirely different light. I began to see what mattered to them, what crushed their spirits, and what made them *want* to be with me and do things with me! As time goes by, I will continue to add book and DVD reviews to my website that highlight some of these key resources. For now, I strongly encourage every dog owner to read the enlightening book by Suzanne Clothier, *Bones Would Rain from the Sky*. It is the best book ever written--and I've read almost all of them--about our human relationships with dogs. It is not a book about dog training per se, but about a way of being with dogs.

Also on my website, www.playfulpooch.org, under Resources, are some articles I've written for various journals or magazines. If you're interested in the things that turned me into a positive dog trainer, read the one entitled *A Psychologist's View of Crossover Training: Personal and Professional Reflections*. Research from a variety of disciplines now points consistently at positive dog training as the way to go. To be humane and ethical, in my view, one must use non-aversive, non-force methods of training. But most of all, as I learned to read my dogs' communication signals, I began to see how

