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Training:

German Shepherds are bred to serve. Without a purpose your shepherd will find its own purpose. Sometimes this may be doing something your would rather they not have as a purpose. Untrained shepherds never reach there full potential. Trained Shepherds are not only more stable, more balanced, and happier, but they become a much more valued and enjoyable pack member.

Training is not an option but a requirement. How far you go is up to you. But I recommend that all of my clients at least complete the German BH obedience degree or something similar such as an AKC obedience degree coupled with a CGC (Canine Good Citizen). The BH was created for the Shepherd specifically, but many other breeds also complete this certification. In brief it includes:

1. On and off leash heeling, part under gunfire
2. a short written test (not for the dog, but the owner)
3. A long down off leash.
4. A number of temperament tests including around other dogs, traffic and people

I find that dogs go through a transformation during training and the bonding and pack order sorting that occurs during training. It is a marvelous way to integrate your new family member. You can read more about it in detail at <http://www.fredlanting.org/2008/06/the-2004-svwusvfei-rules-for-the-bh-qualification-translated-into-english-by-fred-lanting/> .

Some people may want to go further in training. Although at least a BH type of training certification I find absolutely necessary, moving into more advanced training such as schutzhund requires balancing priorities. You must balance your priorities. For example, it is difficult to have a top performing schutzhund dog and have that dog lives in the house, and lavished with attention, not having to work for treats or attention. They lose the drive to perform. Also, building the basis for schutzhund requires a lot of prey drive work with a rag or other item for the puppy to chase and bite and hold. These shepherds are very mouthy already. Add to this prey drive training and a puppy can become unbearable for many people, biting at pants legs, constantly communicating with its mouth nipping and lunging. It can become especially problematic when you have small children with tender skin that can tear if a puppy becomes mouthy and the child pulls its hand or arm away quickly while the dog is still latched on. Although mouthiness lasts for different amounts of time for each dog, usually it will subside by 9 months to a year.

Some people find it very difficult to create the balance. However, many are very successful at weathering the puppy mouthy stage and transitioning to schutzhund training even with a young family. If you are interested in finding out even more about the schutzhund title requirements you can visit the United Schutzhund Clubs of America

Website at: <http://germanshepherddog.com/schutzhund/titles.htm> . Be aware that Schutzhund training, although it can be very enjoyable, is involved and time consuming. One needs to be committed to completing the training which involved tracking, obedience and protection behaviors.

Normally, unless a family member has a deep interest in schutzhund and is willing to commit to completing the training, I think most families would be very satisfied just completing the BH or similar degree.

Some basic tips for home training

1. Always make your dog work. So, for example, if you are feeding them they have to sit and wait as you fill their bowl and only eat when you give the command. And have them do something whenever they get a treat.
2. Dogs learn by repetition. It is better to practice two behaviors (such as sit and stay) and do them 15 times each in one session than to practice 10 things 5 times each.
3. Find out what excites your dog most, food, a ball, and use it to train them. Give it to them when they complete the behavior correctly, and deny it if they don't.
4. Remember to stop the practice while the dog is still excited to continue, not after they are all tired and unenthusiastic. So you leave them somewhat not completely satisfied, so that the next time they will enthusiastically continue training.
5. Use motivation to train wherever possible. NEVER use coercion unless you are certain your dog is completely aware of and knows a behavior and is refusing to do it.
6. Coercion is a complicated subject: You have to know your dog's limits to choose the level of coercion and type of correction. Most dogs do well with a simple leash correction, starting with a choker or fur saver and moving to a prong for harder dogs. Verbalized correction can be used in combination and then separately as the dog learns to respond to them. Direct contact such as a strike is highly inadvisable. We don't want the correction to become personal, out of anger. For some problematic hard dogs with dangerous behaviors, some people find electric collars useful, although I do not use them. The old adage is that ***one strong correction is worth 1000 small ineffective ones.*** Inadequate levels of correction, incrementally elevated can turn out to be a real problem as the dog will just adjust to the level. A good sharp correction is more effective. However, you need to know your dog and how much of a correction they need. Too little will be ineffective, too much could drive them into "avoidance" (tucking their tails, submission, fear and unresponsiveness).
7. You must demand performance. Allowing a dog to sometimes do what you say is a recipe for disaster. They must always finish by completing a behavior. If you just repeat a command over and over without correction, then the dog doesn't learn the repercussions of disobedience and you have lost pack order.
8. Dogs must obey at all times: Not just during training but when friends are over, in stores, walking, in the house, everywhere.

9. Break down behaviors into elements: For example, calling your dog to you to sit in front of you involves
- a. Responding,
 - b. Running to you
 - c. Doing it quickly
 - d. Sitting
 - e. Doing it quickly
 - f. Sitting straight in front
 - g. Staying until released
- You can work on each element independently and then put it together.
10. When you dog does something well: Lavish them with praise!! Lavish praise combined with a strong correction helps the dog to distinguish clearly between proper and improper behavior.

*Remember, it is safer to begin training your German shepherd puppies when young.

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