



16 ways to make life happier with your dog

Here are 16 things you should **stop** doing in order to make life with your dog happier and your relationship stronger. In summary: enjoy what you have and only change things if you have to.

1. Stop being fussy—**don't worry, be happy**

Being a perfectionist has its advantages and disadvantages. Things seldom go 100% the way you expect. You can and should plan and train, but be prepared to accept all kinds of minor mishaps along the way. In most situations “good enough” is sufficient, so why worry about perfection, a concept that only exists in your head and doesn't make either you or your dog happy?

2. Stop being too serious—**have a laugh**

If you don't have a good sense of humour, don't live with a dog. Dog ownership gives rise to many incidents where laughter is the best way out. Don't be embarrassed. Your dog doesn't even know what embarrassment is. You should follow their example. As long as no one gets hurt, just laugh at your and your dog's mistakes.

3. Stop your desire to control everything—**take it as it comes**

If you attempt to control your dog's every move, you'll end up with an ulcer or fall into a depression. Give up your need to control. Of course, you should have reasonable control over your dog for safety's sake, but you should let go of anything that is not a matter of life or death. Reasonable rules serve a purpose, but total control is unnecessary and self-defeating. Take it as it comes and keep smiling!

4. Stop apportioning blame—**move on**

When things go wrong (and they will), don't waste your time apportioning blame. Was it your fault, the dog's fault, or the neighbour's cat's fault? Who cares? Move on. If you found it upsetting, try to avoid a similar situation in the future. If it was no big deal, forget about it.

5. Stop believing in old wives' tales—**be critical**

These days, the Internet provides us with quick and easy access to a lot of valuable information—and a lot of junk as well. Use your critical thinking. Think about it. Seek a second and third opinion. If the argument is sound and you like it, then do it. If the argument is sound but you don't like it, don't do it. If the argument is unsound, reject it and think no more about it. Make up your own mind and do what you think is right.

6. Stop caring about labels—**be free**

Should you be a positive, balanced, realistic, progressive, clicker-ian or authoritarian dog owner? Stop caring about what label you should have. When you enjoy a great moment with your dog, the label you have is irrelevant. Labels are for insecure people that need to hide behind an image. Believe in yourself, be the type of dog owner you want to be and you won't need labels.

7. Stop caring about what others think—**live your life**

You live your whole life with yourself and much less time with anyone else. So, why care about what other people think about your ability as a dog owner or your dog's behaviour, when you probably won't see them again or will only ever see them sporadically? If they like you and your dog, fine. If they don't, it's really not your problem.

8. Stop complaining—**don't waste your time**

You only have a problem when there's a discrepancy between the way things are and the way you expect them to be. If your expectations are realistic, try and do something about achieving them. If they're not, stop complaining. If you can do something about it, do it. If you can't, move on.



9. Stop excusing yourself—be yourself

You don't have to excuse yourself or your dog for the way you are. As long as you don't bother anyone, you are both entitled to do what you like and be the way you are. You don't need to be good at anything, and you don't need excuses why not. Change what you want to change and can change; and don't waste time and energy thinking about what you don't want to, don't need to or can't change. Do whatever you and your dog enjoy, so you're both happy. It's as simple as that!

10. Stop feeling bad—act now

If you're unhappy with any particular aspect of your life with your dog, do something to change it. Identify the problem, set a goal, make a plan and implement it. Feeling bad and guilty doesn't help anyone—it doesn't help you, your dog, or the other people you share your life with.

11. Stop your urge to own—be a mate

The ownership of living beings is slavery; and thankfully slavery was abolished. Don't regard yourself as the owner of your dog. Think of your dog as a mate you are responsible for. By the way, you don't own your children, your partner or your friends either.

12. Stop dependency—untie your self

Love your dog but don't create mutual dependency. Have a life of your own and give your dog some space. You and your dog are two independent individuals. Enjoy living together as free agents, not being addicted each other. Stop projecting yourself onto your dog.

13. Stop turning your dog into a substitute—show respect

Love your dog as a dog. Don't make it a substitute for a human partner, a friend, a child or a spouse. To expect anyone to be a substitute is the greatest disrespect you can show to a human as well as non-human animal—and to yourself.

14. Stop rationalizing—be truthful

All relationships are trades: you give and you take. There's nothing wrong with that as long as there is balance. Be honest with yourself: what does your dog give you and what do you give your dog? If you find that one of you is almost solely a giver or a taker, think about it and redress the balance.

15. Stop wanting what you can't have—be happy with what you've got

You always want what you haven't got and you can be blind to all the good you do have. Your dog already gives you a great deal and the two of you can be perfectly happy together, even if your dog is not particularly good at anything. It's amazing how dog owners say they love their dogs and yet they spend most of the time trying to change their behaviour. Focus on what you do have, not on what you don't, appreciate it and be grateful for it.

16. Stop fighting yourself—follow your heart

There are many different ways of being a good dog owner. Yours is your own and different to everyone else's. It's your life. As long as you don't harm anyone, live it the way that feels good for you. Listen to experts, ponder on their advice, but, at the end of the day, do what you feel is right for you, follow your heart. Be yourself.

(With thanks to Dr Roger Abrantes)