



## **The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

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# **Dog Rights**

Throughout history, art and literature have depicted humans in all walks of life and social strata with dogs, illustrating their widespread acceptance in everyday life. Some religions even incorporated them into their worship. Indeed, dogs have long been admired for the purity of their character traits, with military annals documenting the wartime bravery and courage of dogs in the K-9 Corps.

Closer to home, our own culture is populated with examples of the well-established place dogs have found in our hearts and homes. People of all ages, but particularly the elderly and the young, enjoy their companionship. For single people, dogs offer a welcome relief from loneliness. For children, an animal in the home contributes warmth and unconditional love, and teaches responsibility and consideration for the needs of another creature. Those who suffer from disease or injury experience a therapeutic, even spiritual, benefit from their presence.

Dogs do so much good for the community: they give us a sense of optimism, safeguard us from depression and loneliness, and break down the barriers that isolate us from one another. Their presence improves our health, protects us from danger, and teaches us about caring and responsibility. And they ask for so little in return.

Unfortunately, as a society, we have yet to recognize and appreciate the emotional and psychological needs of dogs. As a result, while our laws demand that a dog kept as a companion receive the basic requirements of sustenance and shelter, there is no way to guarantee that an animal receives love and attention. For the dog, the absence of attention and affection is tragic.

The San Francisco SPCA believes that sharing one's life with a dog is a privilege, governed by general principles, which we call Dog Rights. But just as these rights form a contract between dogs and their human families, we believe that they should also constrain the animal control policies of city governments, the practices of humane organizations, and the principles of all human interactions with dogs. They are:

**The Right to Have their Lives Cherished and Protected**

**The Right to Social Integration**

**The Right to a Fair Share of Public Resources**

**The Right to be Trained Humanely**

**The Right to Act Like Dogs**

## **The Right to Have their Lives Cherished and Protected**

For much of history, animals were considered mere commodities who pulled our wagons, provided the products for our farms, herded our sheep, and kept our barns free of mice. During the last century, however, socio-economic and moral changes in society at large have produced changes in the status of animals as well. Many animals—dogs in particular—are now overwhelmingly companions instead of servants. In addition, government laws and services have evolved from promoting animals as property, to protecting them as cherished pets. But those changes are not uniform. Compassion towards dogs is not always fostered and encouraged. Many people do not know all there is to know about responsible dog care, the importance of spaying and neutering, or the challenges of providing for our canine companions. Countless people became dog lovers only after a stray won our hearts. But rather than encourage and develop responsible pet care in people, dogs and dog guardians are subject to condemnation or punitive penalties.

Obviously, we are not asking that everyone love dogs or even be fascinated by them. We also understand that dogs can inconvenience some humans. But they are living animals deserving of humane treatment. And whether it is dog licensing, pet limits, short shelter-holding periods, no-pet housing policies, limited access to local parks, or any number of restrictive laws and policies, dog lovers and dogs often suffer. While sharing one's life with a dog may not be a fundamental right, it is unquestionably an integral aspect of our daily life—which cannot be dismissed lightly and should not suffer unwarranted limits.

## **The Right to Social Integration**

All people would agree that intentional physical abuse of a dog is a terrible thing. Yet there is another cruel practice to which dogs are subjected far more frequently than corporal abuse. It is a form of mistreatment which is also devastating and painful to a dog, yet often fails to be regarded as abuse at all. It is neglect. Because dogs, like human beings, are pack animals, they, like us, need to socialize in order to remain psychologically healthy. Since domestication, however, companion dogs no longer have packs of dogs with which to live. As a result, they consider humans to be their families, and we serve as their surrogate “pack.” Keeping a dog isolated in a backyard results in miserable, lonely dogs who exhibit aberrant and often annoying traits, such as persistent barking and whining.

## **Dogs need to be with their families**

A dog is a social animal and needs to be with his pack. Dogs should live and sleep inside the house like the rest of the family. They should be integrated into family activities and a period should be set aside each day to spend quality time with them, such as playing ball or taking them for a walk.

The realities of modern life may require that dogs spend some part of the day in the backyard. Many of these dogs receive plenty of love and attention and are happy, healthy companions. Yet to banish a dog to the backyard, while the rest of his “family” live, enjoy one another, and sleep inside, goes against a dog's most basic instincts. And that is no way to treat man's best friend.

## **The Right to a Fair Share of Public Resources**

Because dogs are “pack” animals, dogs should not be kept isolated from one another. In addition, if continually frustrated by their lack of mobility, many dogs will react with intense enthusiasm, such as dashing around wildly. Dogs, therefore, require daily exercise and contact with other dogs in order to remain healthy and well socialized. As one prominent dog advocacy group has noted, “a well socialized dog learns the skills required for getting along with the people and the other dogs [he/she] meets each day.” Further, “dogs socialize with each other through subtle displays of posture and behavior that can only occur when they are not impeded by a leash. A leash limits a dog's natural movement and can even cause some dogs to become territorial, protecting the area to which the leash confines them.” Off-leash areas are therefore essential for the health and well-being of dogs. Because millions of dog lovers throughout the United States depend on local parks to provide for their pets, we believe that their availability is imperative. And because they, like other tax-paying residents, already pay the money used for these parks (and they independently pay for municipal animal control services) dog lovers and their canine companions have a right to numerous, widely accessible off-leash parks.

## **The Right to be Trained Humanely**

Teaching your dog how to behave will not only make him more pleasant to be around, but will also help protect his safety in a world dominated by man-made dangers such as busy streets. But this simple idea has given way to a fiction that we must impart our wisdom for the dog's own good by whatever means necessary. Whether it's the rolled-up newspaper, the choke collar, rubbing their faces in their messes, shock collars, or worse, physical punishment of dogs under the guise of "training a dog for her own good" is still abuse.

A trainer who believes momentary strangling of a dog is necessary to teach her not to pull on her leash is hardly a friend of dogs—and certainly not worth his fee. Indeed, the 1990's have witnessed an explosion of interest in, and development of, training and behavior modification techniques that utilize positive reinforcement rather than corporal punishment as the principle means of motivation. These techniques are now widespread, well-understood, user-friendly, dog-friendly and are available for virtually every training task and behavior problem.

Closer to home, yelling, scruff-shaking, hitting, throw-chains, and shake cans are often used when dogs soil our floors or chew on our furniture. Not only are these techniques unnecessary, but combined with poor timing and lack of knowledge of basic animal learning theory, as is often the case, they are cruel and ineffective. Not only does the dog experience the mental and physical punishment, but he also does not know how to avoid it. Telling ourselves that our pet "knows better" because he is acting "guilty" is not only untrue, it is little more than a justification for our own anger. It is our belief that dogs have the right to be trained and helped to fit into our society with the most benevolent methods available. And we believe that dogs have a right to be free from corporal and mental punishment.

## **The Right to Act Like Dogs**

All of the behaviors that point to a mentally healthy dog—chewing, digging, barking, chasing moving objects, scavenging, excited greetings are often seen as behavior "problems" requiring "treatment." Dogs chew on shoes because in the eyes of a dog, that is what shoes are made for. Many dog lovers and dog trainers spend a great deal of time, develop a great sense of frustration, and cause a great deal of confusion to dogs, by trying to dissuade the dog from acting like a dog.

This does not mean that dogs should be allowed to chew shoes, bite inappropriately, bark endlessly, or dig up our neighbor's garden. But it is our belief that dogs have a right to be provided with outlets for their natural behavior and be actively taught to employ these human-approved outlets, rather than having their behavior deemed unacceptable in any context and therefore punished out of them.

Fortunately, there are many avenues for dogs to act like dogs in socially acceptable ways—fetch, Frisbee, off-leash dog-dog interaction and play, and designated digging areas. In addition, organized sports and activities such as agility and Flyball are now increasingly popular and more widely available.