



StubbyDog™
Rediscover the pit bull.

How to be a Pit Bull Ambassador

By Micaela Myers



“Is that a pit bull?”

“Is he mean?”

“Will he bite?”

With two adopted dogs that many people think look like pit bull mixes, these are questions I hear frequently. More often, people just cross the street or snatch up their children to avoid us. As a result, I try to be a pit bull ambassador whenever I step out the door with my dogs. I want to show people what amazing companions they can be, even if it's just one person at a time.

If you have a pit bull in your family, here are five things you can do to help change people's perceptions:

1. Cultivate a well-behaved dog

It's been said a thousand times, but actions really do speak louder than words. The most important thing you can do if you have a pit bull is to train and socialize your companion. When your dog is young, take him or her places, let him see new things and meet people and pets of all types and ages. Teach your dog basic obedience. Better yet, work to get him certified as a Canine Good Citizen through the AKC's CGC program.

2. Choose your training style and collar carefully

Using harsh methods of correction can result in a fearful dog and further negative perceptions about the behavior of bully breeds. Positive reinforcement training is a better bet. Positive reinforcement rewards good behavior with treats and praise, cultivating confidence and good manners (click here to learn more).

Also, remember that what your dog wears can also influence how people view pit bulls. So avoid “tough-looking” collars, such as those with spikes and metal.

3. Be open to starting a conversation

While some people may cross the street when they see a pit bull-type dog, having a pit bull in the family also provides countless opportunities to talk about misconceptions, whether it's with a coworker, a mother in the park or someone chatting with you in the grocery store line.

Hearing the same stereotype comments every time you say your dog is a pit bull can get old, but don't get defensive. Remember that many people are just repeating things they have heard elsewhere. Educate yourself, and use these opportunities to help others understand the pit bull's plight and true nature.



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4. Take your responsibility seriously

Because we are under additional scrutiny, those of us with pit bull family members must take on an extra sense of responsibility. This is especially true in off-leash areas, such as dog parks. Dog parks can be chaotic, and spats between dogs are common. Even if a pit bull doesn't start the tiff, he may get blamed. Know your dog, and make off-leash decisions carefully.

When it comes to pets, good fences definitely make good neighbors. At home, make sure your yard is properly fenced or keep your dog inside. And even if you're just going to get the mail or take a stroll down the block with your dog, be sure to clip on that leash. Responsibility also means spaying and neutering. Most dogs involved in severe bites and attacks are not spayed or neutered. Spaying and neutering also helps reduce overpopulation and has important health benefits.

5. Let the world see your love

If your dog has some special talent, get out there and celebrate your partnership as you show the world the wonderful things pit bulls can do. Sporty types may want to consider flyball, Frisbee or agility. If your dog loves to strut his manners, there are various types of obedience trials and competitions.

Snuggly types may prefer therapy work. Therapy dogs visit places such as schools, nursing homes, hospitals and hospice centers. There are various organizations that certify therapy dogs. Most require the dog pass a CGC test or similar evaluation. You have the opportunity to help people rediscover the pit bull. Together we can change the world, one waggy tail and slurpy kiss at a time!



Micaela Myers is a magazine editor and the author of three equestrian books. She lives in Southern California with her two adopted, mixed-breed dogs and enjoys volunteering with local rescue groups and the StubbyDog Project.

Photos Courtesy of Pit Bull Rescue San Diego