

The 8 Most Confident Dog Breeds – Do You Have One at Home?

What does it take for a dog to feel and act confident and balanced? How can you help yours be more confident? Given the right environment and caretaker, any dog, in my opinion, can become confident and balanced. Plus: the secret to a sensational dog - how does yours rate?

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Certain dog breeds are considered confident due primarily to their size, intelligence, or desire to protect their humans
- For a dog to become confident and balanced, he also needs to be nurtured in the right environment, by the right guardian
- Confident dogs are always well-socialized and obedience-trained dogs
- The earlier fear-related behaviors in a dog are recognized and addressed, the better the chances she can overcome them

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According to VetStreet, the most confident dog breeds are:

- German Shepherd Dog
- Poodle and Great Dane (tie)
- Rottweiler
- Golden Retriever and Doberman Pinscher (tie)
- Mastiff
- American Pit Bull Terrier
- Jack Russell Terrier
- Labrador Retriever and Bull Mastiff (tie)

I'm guessing size, intelligence, and perhaps a protective nature are the factors VetStreet took into account in compiling this list, since all 11 breeds are known to possess one or more of those attributes.

But while specific breed characteristics certainly play a role in a dog's temperament and personality, I'm sure most of us can recall knowing (or owning) at least one dog of these breeds that was not the least bit confident.

Given the right environment and guardian, any dog can be a confident and balanced individual. Conversely, the confidence of any dog of any breed can be shaken and even extinguished by the wrong environment or human.

Confident Dogs Are Well-Socialized

There's no doubt about it — socialization is the secret to a sensational dog. Unfortunately, there are many dog guardians who don't take seriously the critical importance of socialization for puppies.

A puppy cannot be socialized confined to the house or backyard. She can't be socialized by the occasional ride in the car, walk down the street, or visit to the dog park. The presence of other dogs in the family doesn't mean your puppy is being socialized.

Proper socialization requires exposing your puppy to as many new people, animals, environments and other stimuli as possible without overwhelming him. Over-stimulation can result in excessive fear, withdrawal, or avoidance behavior, so knowing how much is enough is important. Effective socialization means the puppy is:

- Handled from birth and learns to accept touching of all body parts
- Exposed to as many people, other animals, places and situations as possible
- Encouraged to explore and investigate his environment
- Allowed to experience a variety of toys and games, surfaces and other stimuli
- Brought along often on car rides to new environments with his humans

It's also extremely important to socialize a puppy during his first three months of life, before he's 14 to 16 weeks of age. That is the period when sociability outweighs fear, and the brain is primed to accept new experiences.

What your puppy is exposed to during this critical time in his development will mold his behavior, character and temperament for the rest of his life.

Puppies that aren't socialized during their first three months are at dramatically increased risk for behavior problems like aggression, fear and avoidance. Dogs with problems stemming from lack of early socialization fill animal shelters and rescue facilities in every city and state across the country.

Confident Dogs Also Receive Obedience Training

Along with socialization to build confidence, it's important that puppies are trained in basic obedience. One way to get your pup off to a good start is by taking advantage of local puppy classes. Enrolling in a professionally run puppy class can deliver tremendous benefits for both of you, including:

- Increasing your pup's responsiveness to commands
- Teaching bite inhibition through puppy play, and proper interaction with people, including strangers
- Learning tips for successful housetraining and how to prevent hyperactivity — two of the most common reasons given by owners who relinquish their dogs to shelters
- Developing realistic expectations for your dog
- Strengthening your bond with your puppy

The most important thing to keep in mind with regard to obedience training is that dogs learn desired behavior through positive reinforcement.

Positive reinforcement behavior training means rewarding good behavior and ignoring undesired behavior. It doesn't mean yelling or physical punishment of any kind.

Use very small-sized treats (pea sized is good, and you can even use frozen peas if your dog seems to like them) and verbal praise and affection to encourage desired behaviors in your dog.

Pick short, preferably one-word commands for the behaviors you want to teach your dog. Examples are come, sit, stay, down, heel, off, etc. Make sure all members of your family consistently use exactly the same command for each behavior.

As soon as your dog performs the desired behavior, reward her immediately with a treat and verbal praise. Do this every time she responds appropriately to a command. You want her to connect the behavior she performed with the treat. Keep training sessions short and fun. You want your dog to associate good things with obeying your commands. You also want to use training time as an opportunity to deepen your bond with your pet.

Gradually back off the treats and use them only intermittently once your dog has learned a new behavior. Eventually they'll no longer be necessary, but you should always reward your dog with verbal praise whenever she obeys a command. Continue to use positive reinforcement to maintain the behaviors you desire. Reward-based training helps create a range of desirable behaviors in your pet, which builds mutual feelings of trust and confidence.

How to Recognize a Dog's Fear Signals, and What to Do About Them

Your pup may act a bit startled when he encounters someone or something new or unfamiliar. This is fine as long as he recovers quickly, remains curious, and is willing to continue on with the adventure. This indicates he's adapting normally to strange stimuli.

If, however, he doesn't recover within a few minutes, it's not okay. And certainly if he is so upset he starts crying, pees or poops out of fear, or tries to find a place to hide, it's not okay.

It's also never okay to "toughen up" a puppy by deliberately scaring him. This will only intensify the problem. Other signs of fear in your dog can include:

- Whining
- Trembling
- Avoidance
- Vomiting
- Salivating
- Diarrhea
- Withdrawal
- Scanning
- Excessive panting
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Refusal to eat

- Vigilance

Research shows puppies can inherit fearful tendencies that can be spotted as early as 5 weeks of age. And pups who are anxious worriers at 3 months will grow into worried, anxious adults without proper intervention.

The earlier you recognize and seek help for fear-related behaviors in your puppy or adult dog, the better the outcome. I recommend talking with your veterinarian or an **animal behavior specialist** about how to help an abnormally fearful or anxious dog.

Please don't make the mistake of assuming if you continue to expose your dog to a fearful situation she'll overcome her fear. In fact, the opposite will happen and you and your furry companion will end up dealing with a long-term, intractable problem.

Sources and References

[VetStreet August 17, 2014](#)
