

What is the Canine Good Citizen Program?

By Brenda Howard

The Canine Good Citizen ® Program or CGC was developed by the American Kennel Club over 10 years ago as a way to encourage pet owners to train their dogs. The program is designed to reward and encourage good manners! It has been a phenomenal success. The AKC through “evaluators” and training programs all across the United States tested thousands of dogs in 2007. There are more than 7000 CGC evaluators in the states.

The dog and handler who decide to participate in the program must demonstrate the ability to perform the following tasks:

- 1) Accept a friendly stranger
- 2) Sit politely for petting
- 3) Hold politely for grooming
- 4) Walk on a loose lead (not pulling!)
- 5) Walk through a crowd politely
- 6) Sit and lay down on command - staying in place
- 7) Come when called
- 8) Polite behavior around other dogs
- 9) Handle distraction
- 10) Handle supervised separation

Dogs do not need to demonstrate precision obedience or competition obedience skills to participate in the CGC program. It truly is designed to evaluate good behavior, rather than obedience skills.

All dogs can participate in the program whether they are purebred or mixed breed, intact or altered. Dogs are never too old to take the CGC test. Puppies can participate as long as they have received their necessary immunizations such as Distemper/Parvo and Rabies inoculations.

Because temperaments can change and behaviors are learned, it is a good idea to retest older dogs that were very young when they first took the CGC. The test takes roughly 20 to 30 minutes for most dogs and their owners. The time it takes to prepare for the CGC varies. If your dog already knows how to sit and lay down, the rest of the testing criteria are usually easily learned in a few sessions. Many training programs offer a short course to assist in preparation for the test. Typically these types of classes can take anywhere from a few hours to a few weeks to complete.

Unlike formal obedience competition, the CGC program encourages owners to use verbal praise and encouragement during the test. Food treats are not allowed during the testing even though they make good reinforcers while training. Toys and squeaky toys are not allowed during testing either.

The owner will be asked to sign a Responsible Dog Owners Pledge prior to the CGC testing. This pledge is an important part of the overall goal of the CGC program in that it encourages owners to be responsible for their dogs needs such as health care, safety, exercise, training and quality of life. Owners also agree to be responsible for their dog's behavior in public places and to never let their dog bother others in public.

Many programs that use dogs in therapy work stipulate that the CGC be earned prior to more advanced tasks are learned and prior to certification for work in hospitals, schools, nursing homes and other public places.

Ask your local training facility if they administer the CGC test or if they have a training/testing program available. The cost for testing and training varies but is usually very affordable. The cost is established by the individual or facility or club providing the testing.

If you would like to learn more about the CGC program visit the American Kennel Club website at www.akc.org. You too can have a “Canine Good Citizen!”

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, The Basset Hound Club of America and The Pet Care Services Association (formerly the ABKA).

The information presented here is not intended to substitute for the advice and care of a veterinarian. Please consult your veterinarian regarding all issues relating to your dog's health.



7/14/08