

RATTLESNAKE AVOIDANCE TRAINING

Rattlesnake avoidance training has been proven to be safe, humane and effective in helping to teach dogs to stay away from rattlesnakes that they see, hear or smell (and yes, rattlesnakes do smell different than non-venomous snakes due to the presence of the venom).

Rattlesnakes can be found active in So. Ca. almost any month of the year (The optimum temperature for them to be active is 70-90 degrees Fahrenheit- they don't care what month it is or what time of day) and their bites are quite common, dangerous and usually very expensive to treat ...IF the animal survives. If you are observant of your dogs' body language after training it may alert you to the presence of a rattlesnake, possibly helping you avoid a painful encounter.

Gina Gables, dog trainer & owner of Ma & Paw Kennel - Canine Training Services has been training dogs since 1991. Gina personally trains every dog to recognize and avoid the sight, sound and scent of rattlesnakes. Having a complete understanding of dog behavior, her experience and sensitivity allows the dogs to be humanely treated during the training process. She possesses the ability, patience and willingness to work with dogs that are shy, fearful, aggressive, unfocused, hyper-obedient, or that have separation anxiety. EVERY dog is treated as an individual and will be given as much time as he/she needs.

Our rattlesnake wranglers take great care of the rattlesnakes we keep for this service, maintaining the snakes' wellbeing 24/7 ...even on training days. The snakes receive mice on a regular schedule and unlimited bottled spring water. The snakes are muzzled & unmuzzled afterwards, which is no easy task! (We are always looking for volunteers to help... just kidding!) We are grateful to the guys who put their own lives and limbs at risk to ensure the safety of your dogs.

Our FIRST PRIORITY is the comfort and safety of all involved. Every precaution is taken to minimize danger to dogs, humans and snakes. For the most effective training we use live rattlesnakes which have been **DOUBLE** muzzled to prevent them from being able to bite. Our very realistic and thorough training takes place on our mock trail course using a remote training collar (either vibrate, spray or static shock). Collars are chosen and adjusted specifically for each dogs' temperament, sensitivity and response. Gina will consult with each owner prior to beginning and will use only the minimum level of stimulation necessary to achieve the desired results (just enough to teach, not traumatize!).

The program consists of a multi-step process that usually takes about 15 minutes. *Dogs returning for annual refresher training may not need to go thru all stations.

Throughout the course please listen to Gina and follow directions throughout. On the course we may purposely put the snake between you and your dog to see what he would do. Would he come straight to you in a panic or calmly figure out what to do. The behavior we hope to see is either your dog going WAAAY around the snake to get to you or just staying put where they feel safe.

With the snake between you and your dog, if needed Gina *may* ask you to encourage your dog to come to you in **SUBTLE** ways such as whistling, kissing, squatting down, patting your legs, etc... Please **DO NOT** use your 'formal' recall (ex: "Come/Here") command. The reason being is if your dog does respond as they have been taught and come straight to you, running right past the snake then I will have to correct them when they are near the snake and you never want something unpleasant to happen to your dog when they have responded correctly to a command.

The trainer will walk the dog on a leash accompanied by the owner, through our mock trail course to various staging areas:

FIRST STATION: The WHOLE picture: First we take your dog up to a live 'rattling' rattlesnake. We make several approaches including from the downwind side, making sure your dog gets an opportunity to commit to memory the sight, sound & scent of the whole snake before we begin to teach it to avoid. After this 'introduction', each time the dog shows an interest in approaching the snake the remote training collar will be activated. Keep your eyes on your dog so you can notice the body language displayed when the dog is showing avoidance and **PRAISE** every time dog refuses to go towards the snake or is moving away to reinforce that behavior... Timing is key! When consistent avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we retreat, **PRAISE** and proceed to the next station.

SECOND STATION: Scent Recognition

Dogs investigate & experience the world primarily with their nose and so our training incorporates a LOT of opportunities for your dog to memorize the scent of a rattlesnake. To teach your dog to recognize & avoid the specific smell of a rattlesnake we will then introduce the dog to just the **scent** of rattlesnake with no visual or sound present. (Naturally shed snake skins acting as 'hidden snakes' placed under various natural items such as rocks, logs and bricks – alternating the natural items in each of the 3 separate isolated scent stations). This is in case the dog is ever poking around inside holes, under logs, etc. and comes across this smell again without seeing or hearing the snake; they'll know it is a threat as they associate the discomfort from training with the smell. If after getting a good "whiff" they don't show an avoidance response they are given a moderate correction which implants within their mind that even just the smell is bad. *If your dog has a good nose and got close to the first snake initially, it is possible that he/she will know to avoid the scented items too having learned the smell from the real

thing in step 1... Therefore, it is common for dogs to not need correcting at this step. Each time the dog shows an interest in approaching the scent, the remote training collar will be activated. When avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we retreat, **PRAISE** and proceed to the next station.

Gina uses a powder as well as flags on the course help us to indicate wind direction so pay attention to your dogs' body language especially when we are approaching the scent stations with the wind in the dogs' face.

THIRD STATION: Sound Recognition

To teach your dog to recognize and avoid the sound of a rattlesnake, the trainer accompanied by the owner will bring your dog to the next training area where your dog will be introduced to just the **sound** of a rattlesnake. A naturally concealed speaker with high quality rattlesnake recordings will be activated remotely as the dog unknowingly approaches it. We observe the dogs' response and if the dog shows interest in investigating the sound of the rattling by approaching it the remote training collar will be activated. When avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we **PRAISE** and proceed to the next station.

FOURTH STATION: Sight ONLY Recognition

To teach your dog to avoid the sight of a rattlesnake when they can't hear or smell it, the dog will be brought to the next staging area to be introduced to just the **sight** of a live rattlesnake. This snake is not rattling, and we approach it from the **upwind** side, so they can't smell it first. Stimulation will occur when your dog shows an interest in the snake. We then bring your dog to the downwind side, so they can 'confirm their suspicions' by getting a whiff of it or we may add a rattle sound effect. Again, each time avoidance behavior is displayed by the dog we retreat, **PRAISE** and proceed to the next phase.

Dogs also will be introduced to a baby rattlesnake. It is important that your dog sees that rattlesnakes come in various sizes as babies are sometimes as small as a lizard! And no, baby rattlesnakes are **not** more dangerous than an adult (If interested in reading an article on this subject or other rattlesnake related articles, please help yourself to the materials on the display table).

Your dog will then have additional opportunities to be exposed to the sight, scent and sound in multiple separate locations on the course to help ensure that your dog makes a negative association and displays avoidance behavior toward the correct

stimulus: (sight, sound or scent of the snake) and not any of the other dummy items we may have on the course.

Finally, we go to the final test area. A live snake is placed on the ground... Again, dogs should demonstrate their avoidance response by either going WAAAY around the snake or refusing to go forward at all. If you brought a toy or treat to test your dog with, we will use it at this time. If you have more than one dog or hike together with friends, we will train each dog separately then test the dogs in a group at the Final station to rule out pack mentality setting in should they ever encounter a rattlesnake when out with their buddy. We wouldn't want them to be more confident to by the presence of their buddy and mistakenly think they can 'take on' that snake now that they have it outnumbered.

Please remember during the training:

- 1- Please be quiet... EXCEPT FOR LOTS OF VERBAL PRAISE WHEN YOUR DOG DISPLAYS AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOR!! ...Keep the talking and questions to a minimum. Your dog needs to be able to concentrate on learning ... NOT your voice, and the trainer needs to concentrate on your dog's training! You will have a chance to ask questions at the beginning and end.**
- 2- Please listen & pay attention so you can follow the trainer's specific directions on the course.**
- 3- Please DO NOT use your 'formal' recall ("Come/Here") command on the course**
- 4- Please pay attention to your dogs' body language (remember later this can possibly alert *you* to the presence of a rattlesnake.)**

****** Since animals don't generalize well, we believe the best learning is accomplished by having the dogs experience the training twice the first year (Their initial training and a 'generalizer' session soon after ...*in an alternate location*) then annual test/refreshers after that. We do this to solidify and proof the training by helping the dogs to generalize their training (since animals are very situational learners) and it also gives you a unique opportunity to test your dogs' avoidance behavior in a controlled setting (i.e.: with muzzled rattlesnakes!)