

Principles of Positive Training

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Training should be a fun experience for you and your dog. If you know more about the way your dog thinks and learns you can be extremely effective in communicating your expectations. In this handout, I've provided the biggest points to incredible training with your dog.

Mental Stimulation & Enrichment

As dog lovers and owners, we should always take into account the state of our dogs physical *AND* mental health. While people find it very easy to come up with ideas for physical exercise, many people don't take into account that exercising the mind is **just as important**. Dogs that are properly physically *and* mentally exercised are much more likely to be the best version of themselves. Please refer to the [Mental Stimulation & Enrichment](#) hand out for more ideas on how to exercise your dog's brain!

Behavior that is Reinforced is More Likely to Reoccur

Dogs do whatever works in their favor. If your dog has a history of getting treats after you ask him to sit, he is more likely to sit next time you ask him to. If you knee your dog in the chest every time he jumps (behavior), he has learned that jumping gets him attention (reinforcement) - dogs typically don't care if they're getting good or bad attention as long as they're getting it. Learn to ignore unwanted behaviors (jumping) and reinforce behaviors you want (sitting).

A Mark & Reward System is your Friend

Marker signals are used to effectively communicate "that behavior is *exactly* what I wanted." We use markers as a way to eliminate confusion for the animal and speed up learning. When training, it's very important for the reinforcement to *follow after* the marker signal within one to two seconds (not before, not after) so the correct association is made by the animal.

Management. Management. Management.

This is our first step of every training plan. We are going to alter an environment to cater to our success in training. Environments may or may not need continuous management, but initially it's always the first thing to consider doing so we can set ourselves and our dogs up for success!

Instead of This.... Do That!

"Instead of" behaviors are the most important part of the training process because they replace all the unwanted behaviors you've been trying to get rid of!

What do you want them to do instead?

- *Instead of stealing food off the counters, wait outside the kitchen for a stuffed Kong.*
- *Instead of jumping on the kids when they get home from school, sit and wait by the door to be released for a calmer hello.*
- *Instead of chewing on my shoes, I'll give you an appropriate toy to chew on.*

Extinction Bursts

Before it starts getting better, it's going to get worse.

When dogs present attention seeking behavior (jumping, demand barking, etc) the behavior is very likely to experience a jump in intensity because the dog is saying, "Hey, this worked before - maybe if I do it louder/more/higher it will work again!" If these extinction bursts continue to go ignored, as well as an appropriate "instead of" behavior being consistently reinforced, the unwanted behavior will go away!

What do you mean you don't want any more chicken?!

Just like our cravings and desire for different goodies can fluctuate, dogs also have these shifts in cravings. This is important to consider when we're training! Using different proteins and new treats can keep our dogs engaged and excited to learn new behaviors. Your dog might have worked for boiled chicken yesterday, but today he's in the mood for salmon flavored wet dog food... or cream cheese... or chunks of beef... or cheese... or regular ol' dog treats... the possibilities are endless!

Jackpots & a Sliding Scale of Reinforcement

Jackpots - giving our dog multiple treats for a really awesome jump in a behavior we want to see. *Jackpots should be given one treat at a time, not all in one handful!*

Sliding Scale of Reinforcement - never wrong, but sometimes more right.

We reward a dog for every repetition of a behavior, but they get something extra yummy rewards for big jumps in progress. *Kaiser gets kibble every time he places one or two paws on his mat in the kitchen, but gets real bacon for sitting or laying down on it.*

Raise Criteria Slowly

We don't ask first graders to do tenth grade math - this is exactly how we should be looking at our dog's training plans. If we're going above and beyond our dog's current scope of understanding, we are setting the dog and ourselves up for failure and lots of frustration. Raise your expectations and criteria at the learner's pace!

Behavior will not always be contingent on food being present IF...

As dog owners and busy people living our lives, it's unreasonable to expect people to carry treats for their dogs around with them 24/7 for the rest of the dog's life. This is where a very important aspect of training called reinforcement history comes into play. This is trainer talk for "if you teach a behavior at the learner's pace and proceed to fade treats, your dog will rely on their history of being rewarded for this behavior and it will be very likely to reoccur every time you ask." Basically, you have to put the work in to build your pyramid!