

Positive Training Principles and Tips

Training your dog should be an enjoyable experience for both of you. The more you understand about how your dog thinks and learns, the more effectively you can communicate. Clear communication means successful training and good behavior-with no need for force or coercion!

1. Behavior that is rewarded is more likely to reoccur. This powerful principle is a key component of reward-based training. *Dogs do what works.* If your dog receives praise and a treat for sitting, he is more likely to sit the next time you ask. If he knows that jumping on you will earn your attention, he will keep jumping, as attention is rewarding to him.

2. Dogs learn by association. When training, it is important that the reward closely follow the desired behavior. For example: when teaching your dog to sit, the praise and treat should be given when his rear touches the floor, not after he's stood up again. On the other side of the coin, reprimanding your dog for something he may have done hours ago (e.g., you come home to find your slippers shredded) is pointless. Your dog won't associate your yelling with what he's done, and if it happens often enough, he may begin to fear your arrival home, as you are always angry for no reason he can fathom.

3. Reward behaviors you want, rather than punishing behaviors you don't want. Most of us are so accustomed to noticing "mistakes" our dogs make that it seems strange to begin noticing and rewarding "good" behavior. For example: your dog barks, so you yell at him to be quiet. Sure, a barking dog is hard not to notice. But what about when he's lying calmly? Most of us never consider rewarding calm behavior, so the dog only gets rewarded with our attention (even yelling is attention) when he is doing something inappropriate. Having been rewarded, of course he keeps doing those things! Make a habit of noticing and rewarding your dog for good behavior.

4. Extinction *If a behavior is ignored, it will eventually extinguish on its own.* Imagine you are trying to buy a soda from a vending machine. You drop in your change, press the button, and wait. Nothing happens. You press the button more forcefully, and try a few others as well. Still nothing. You jangle the change lever. No soda, no change. You might even, at that point, shake or kick the machine. Finally, grumbling to yourself, you give up and leave. In this example, the soda-seeking behavior *extinguished* because there was no payoff, no reward. Kicking or shaking the machine is an example of an *extinction burst*. What that means with your dog is that if you ignore an unwanted behavior, it will eventually stop (unless it is something that is inherently self-rewarding to the dog, such as digging). But before your dog gives up, the behavior may actually escalate. Recognize the extinction burst for what it is, and wait it out-the behavior *will* eventually stop, and will stop even sooner the next time around.

5. Positive reinforcement is something the dog wants. Just because you think those expensive new treats are a great reward doesn't mean they are. If your dog turns his nose up at them, they're not much of a reward in his mind. A reward can be petting, verbal praise, a throw of the ball, a quick game with a favorite toy, sniffing grass, saying hello to another dog, etc. The sky's the limit. Consider what your dog finds rewarding, and use it!

6. Jackpot! *The jackpot is something really special, head and shoulders above the usual reward.* Your dog can earn this amazing prize by doing something especially wonderful. While it is always important to use training treats your dog likes, save the Super-Yummy, Best-Treat-In-The-World as a jackpot. For example, a dog knows what Sit means, but doesn't sit very quickly. When you give the sit cue, he

watches you for a moment, then languidly lowers his butt to the floor. You can almost hear him sigh, "Okay, if I must." But on the fourth repetition, he responds immediately; butt hits floor in record time. Jackpot! You immediately give him one piece after another of the special treat, along with effusive praise (and petting, if he enjoys it). You can also give a mega-jackpot by tossing a shower of treats. Jackpotting makes an impression - it calls the dog's attention to the fact that he's done something wonderful. He is therefore more likely to perform the behavior better than usual the next time. A jackpot doesn't have to be food, either. If your dog lives for a toss of the ball or a game of tug, use that as your jackpot. Know your dog and use what works for him.

7. Find an alternate behavior. When you want your dog to stop doing something, give him something else to do that is incompatible with the behavior you don't want. For example: if your dog jumps on you, have him sit instead; he can't sit and jump at the same time. If he chews on furniture, give him an appropriate chew toy instead. Try this: On a piece of paper, draw a vertical line down the center. On the left, list all the things your dog does that you'd like him to stop doing. On the right, next to each behavior, write down something he could do instead. It's easy!

8. Raise criteria gradually in small increments, building on each success. Simply put, that means *don't expect too much too soon*. Instead, build small steps to get from Point A to Point B. For example: when teaching your dog to down-stay, start with a three-second down-stay. If that is successful, add two seconds, and so forth. Any time your dog does not perform an exercise correctly, consider whether you have proceeded too quickly. Go back to the point at which your dog was last successful, then build gradually. Setting your dog up to succeed eliminates the need for corrections.

9. If trained correctly, behavior is not contingent on food being present. This is something that many people who are opposed to food-reward training don't understand. If you phase treats out gradually and use lots of real-life rewards (petting, games, etc.) as well, your dog will do as asked even when no treats are present. Use a lot of treats at first to teach and then practice new behaviors. Eventually, rewards should become fewer and farther between-but they should not stop altogether. You wouldn't want to stop getting paid once you got better at your job, so don't forget to reward at times for a job well done!

10. Training should be fun!

- Keep training sessions short; 3-5 minutes a few times daily is fine.
- Focus on one behavior in each session.
- Keep an upbeat attitude when training. Don't train when you're cranky
- End each training session on a successful note. Did your dog do seven good sits, with the last one being really great? End the session there.
- Once a new behavior has been learned, incorporate it into your daily routine.

BE KIND TO YOUR DOG AND HAVE FUN TRAINING!

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