

Training & Learning



When you start training, bear in mind that all dogs are individuals and will progress at different rates. This varies according to breed, size, sex, and individual temperament. Some puppies and dogs are quick learners, others absorb information more slowly but are less likely to 'forget' a lesson once it is learnt.

Keep training sessions to a maximum of 3 minutes, very positive with lots of praise and rewards for best results.

Learning

Dogs learn in similar ways to us, through trial and error from the immediate results of their actions. Like us, dogs learn by making associations, by pairing a behaviour with a consequence. Some experiences can be hugely negative, whereas others can be highly positive:

e.g. Child traps hand in car door → pain → do not repeat this!

e.g. Dog gets treat when sits → nice! → repeat this!

Everyday our dogs are learning about us and their environment. As with us, this can only be taught little by little and occasional step backs are normal and to be expected.

Taking plenty of time to build a relationship and establish genuine trust, alongside using positive training methods will be the way to success.

Gradual introductions + positive reinforcement = calm, helpful dog!

Most of us have worked out that reward is a far better motivator than punishment. Would we be going to work each day if we weren't rewarded with a pay packet?

Pain, discomfort, yelling, anger, and force only causes stress, fear, aggression, confusion, and unhappiness. When punishment is used the trust and bond between dog and handler will be affected. Also the dog simply will not learn when scared.

Being patient with a young dog and teaching them to accept that we can touch and handle them and it is a nice experience will be one of the most important things we do.

Spend lots of time teaching your dog that they can enjoy grooming, playing one to one with us, learning 'our rules' and being rewarded for these things, and in return this will teach them to be a balanced and well-rounded member of the family.

Positive reinforcement relies on the introduction of something nice to reward a desired behaviour, such as providing a treat when your dog walks nicely on the lead.

Positive reinforcement not only dramatically improves the welfare of the dog, introducing hugely positive elements to their life, but it also ensures faster, more effective, life-long learning.



Building solid relationships

Encouraging and empowering methods are the best way to build positive relationships.

The more positive, calm experiences that you and other members of the family can have with their dog (being sure not to introduce too much too soon) the better and more solid the relationship will be.

Tips for success

Follow these guidelines at home to aid success:

- Find a training area that is free from distractions, particularly when just starting out.
- Keep training sessions short; either 10 treats in your hand, or a maximum of a 3 minute session, then end with a 'jackpot'.
- If your dog is finding an exercise difficult, go back a step and praise them for their effort. You will find they are more successful when you try again at the next training session.
- Follow the 3 golden rules; reward behaviour that you do want, ignore behaviour that you do not want, or train an incompatible behaviour.

Using treats

If you are working with your dog at home or attending a training class, you will get through a fair amount of treats. Using a portion of your dog's daily food ration will help to ensure that they are not getting over-fed, and helps avoid stomach upsets.

When you start taking your puppy or dog out and about to areas that have a lot of new sights, sounds and smells, such as parks and training classes, it will be very hard for them to concentrate. Using a special treat such as sausage, chicken or ham in very small amounts will encourage your dog to focus on you. Be clever with your treats – use higher value treats (those your dog loves the most) for more difficult and challenging training sessions and situations, to really make it worth their time.

Training methods

When you begin training your dog, you will first notice 'trial-and-error' learning, where our dogs are trying to understand what they must do to get a reward. As our dogs cannot instantly know what we are asking of them, we need to adopt a gradual approach, asking for a little at a time, gradually working towards the finished behaviour that we are aiming for.

With repetition, consistency, and reward, your dog will start doing the behaviour reliably so that they can get their treats and praise.

After repeated associations between the behaviour and a positive reward, your dog gradually becomes faster and more accurate. Just as with us when learning to drive a car or ride a bike, the behaviour takes some time to understand.

During the initial training sessions where your dog is still learning, you will be rewarding and praising each time. Once the behaviour has been understood, you can start to mix up when you reward to every other time etc. to keep your dog engaged and eager.

Have a mix of treats with different flavours, smells, and textures. Verbal praise and physical affection is also highly rewarding for our dogs, so don't forget to use them!

Jackpots

This is simply a handful of rewards to end the session on a really positive note. Whilst your dog is eating the treats scattered on the floor, you have the time to remove your training aids, so the training session has been finished clearly.

Training & Learning - Worksheet

Using positive reinforcement not only dramatically improves the welfare of your dog, introducing hugely positive elements to their life, but it also ensures faster, more effective, life-long learning.

Common scenarios

Review the below scenario, decide which are positive or negative to the dog:

- 1. The dog receives a treat after jumping in the car when asked.**
- 2. The handler taps his dog on the nose when he barks at the doorbell.**
- 3. The owner shouts when the dog investigates the passer by in the park.**
- 4. The owner and dog are training in the garden. The owner suddenly stops the training session and starts talking to the neighbour.**

Long term effects

Now think about the long term effects of each method, particularly in terms of motivation, enthusiasm, and therapeutic relationships.

How might you change some of the scenarios so that you teach the same thing in a positive way?