

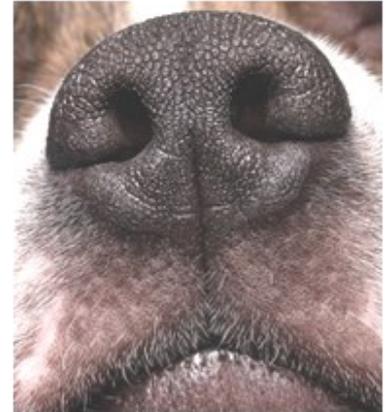
Scent training



Why do scent training with your dog?

Scent work benefits:

- **Building a strong relationship**
- **Can improve recall**
- **Can be used as enrichment at any age**
- **Can be done without affecting other areas of training and the children can get involved**
- **Helps manage intelligence, anxiety and frustration**
- **Improves confidence and self control**



When a dog is on the scent of something it becomes totally engrossed in the activity. Certain breeds are more prone to this than others. Allowing a dog to sniff on a walk means it does take you longer but the dog is taking in more information from the environment. It is clear how important scent is as a dog in a new area will primarily use its nose to check out the new environment. Using their nose on familiar routes is also important, investigating who has passed through that area. All this information the dog is gathering could add to feelings of **familiarity and security**.

When teaching scent work you are not teaching a dog to use their nose but it is an outlet for their natural behaviour that leads to something rewarding. **Dogs that may be showing undesirable behaviours are often very intelligent and have a higher drive to work than other pet dogs.** Nose work can increase the dog's focus and reduce reactivity and frustration. Although this is unlikely to resolve behavioural problems on its own but having the opportunity to engage in an activity that is self rewarding will help dogs feel good, in turn this will improve the likelihood of positive behaviour changes.

It is recommended that you start with using food rather than toys as food calms and play excites, however when dealing with a dog that has inappropriate or frustration play with owners or dogs (e.g. grabbing, jumping up etc) then they will eventually need to learn to play with toys to channel this. Toys can be used for the dog to hunt then played with at the end for a reward but the toy has to be very motivating for the dog. So if the dog enjoys competition, play tug, but if they enjoy chase, then the toy can be swung on a rope or thrown. If using food, you can use tasty treats such as cheese or sausage; remember to take treats out of their food rations.

Scent training games

Ball pit challenge and interactive toys



Hiding treats in a ball pit, boxes full of shredded paper, under plant pots are all easy activities that encourage interaction between dogs and children and also provide an outlet for dogs to use their nose. These activities are useful for puppies that have just joined the family.



Scent training games (Continued...)

Food chase and hunt

This is the simplest way to introduce nose work.

1. Show the dog a treat then throw it a short distance from you. The dog then has to use its nose to find it.
2. With practice the dog should be able to start to find it in harder situations such as long grass or further away.
3. As soon as the dog finds the food, excitedly call the dog and show them the next piece of food. Then as the dog approaches throw the food and so on.

This is a quick way to improve recall and keep the dog focussed on you. **This is ideal for hound types who are not particularly interested in toys.** By combining food with a toy e.g. Peanut butter in a KONG, the dog can start to associate fun with an object and **gradually be encouraged to find toys more exciting.**

Scatter feeding

Anxious dogs that get very excited and jump up, scatter feeding can be useful way of encouraging incompatible behaviours. When arriving home throw a handful of treats on the floor or out in the garden for the dog to search out and keep them busy for quite a few minutes so diffusing the situation.

Searching game

Useful for dogs that are boisterous, that need hands off training or for getting children involved without having direct contact with the dog. It is also a good way to mentally and physically tire your dog. Teaching a release word such as 'go find' also puts the behaviour on cue and can help gain control over unwanted hunting behaviour and will be a signal to the dog as to what is about to happen.

1. Start with food in front of the dog, say excitedly 'go find', encourage the dog to eat it, repeat this several times over 3 days.
2. For next 3 days continue to do this but put it further away or just round the corner of furniture. Do this in front of the dog and again say 'go find'.
3. The following 3 days make it steadily harder for the dog e.g. Back of the furniture, in another room, out in the garden. If the dog is confidently finding these when they have seen you going and hiding it then you can progress onto the next step.
4. Place food around the garden and kitchen without the dog being able to see where they are being placed. Put a couple of food portions in places where they can easily be found by the dog so it encourages the dog to search. This should gradually increase the dog's determination and stamina so they may spend 20 mins searching for food. Once you achieve this you can start outside the home.
5. Find an area such as a park. Start as you did in the home, with the food right in front of the dog, using the same cue. Gradually increase to hiding behind trees etc so it becomes more challenging. If the dog has poor recall use a flexi lead or a training line.

Carrying out games like this on a walk gives the dog something else to focus on and will be beneficial for those dogs that are easily distracted. When the dog has progressed to searching for food in the park etc. you can start to hide food before walking the dog there. Then you and the dog can go round looking for the food together and occasionally helping the dog out by pointing to food and calling them over. **This will increase their focus on you and improve recall** because it pays to keep an eye on you.

Scent training games (Continued...)

Tracking

Tracking on cue takes more work than search games.

1. Handler goes ahead on a walk, leaving a piece of food every step (use cheese or something that is easily visible and has a strong smell).
2. The dog is encouraged to keep their nose to the floor and highly motivated by lots of easily accessible nice food.
3. Gradually make the track more difficult, decreasing frequency of food and covering a greater distance. Always have a big reward at the end of the track to signify tracking has ended.

Again dogs with poor recall use a line or a flexi lead but don't interfere with their tracking.

Track back

This is easier to do on a walk. Again it **increases the dogs focus on you and increases their exercise** as they are covering ground twice and don't get over stimulated as they do when chasing balls etc.

1. When walking, place the food down, walk on a couple of paces and send the dog back for the food.
2. Gradually walk further before sending the dog back for the food.
3. Gradually the dog will track back further and further, tracking back where you have walked until reaching the food.



Searching for lost people

This is a great **family game** as you need two people.

1. One person holds the dog. With the dog watching the other person goes off and hides, then calls the dog.
2. When the dog finds the person, praise and reward with food or a game.
3. Gradually increase the time or distance the person hides. When the dog gets really skilled at finding them, they can start to hide without the dog seeing.
4. The dog will then rely on both tracking the ground and air scenting.

Scent training games (Continued...)

Teaching a dog to find a certain scent

Teaching a dog to find a particular scent takes longer and a dedicated trainer.

1. Dip cotton wool in the scent you want the dog to find e.g. Essential oils.
2. Reward the dog for sniffing it when you are holding it. Do this several times.
3. Gradually move it away from you, again always rewarding the dog for sniffing it. The dog should quickly associate the smell with a treat.
4. You then can start to hide the cotton wool and send the dog to 'go find' it (put behaviour on cue otherwise the dog will constantly indicate where the scent has been). Place it where the dog can smell it but not reach it, the dog should show some kind of indication that they have found it, such as pawing at it, stopping and looking at you etc.
5. Gradually increase the difficulty.
6. Place the cotton wool in a jar or plastic bag so to not get the scent on anything else and obviously finish the session (throwing handful of treats on the floor then putting treats and equipment away).

You can teach dogs to search out particular item in the same way e.g. A tennis ball, where you first reward them for sniffing it etc.

Teaching an Indication

Once you have taught the dog to search for a person or a certain item you can progress onto the dog doing something in particular to indicate they have found the item or the person e.g. Sit or lie down. This has to be taught separately.

1. Decide what indication you want the dog to do e.g. Sit.
2. Practice rewarding the dog for sitting next to the person they will be searching for or next to the item they have learnt to search out.
3. Once they start to catch on, then you can start to introduce the search part again.
4. Start off easy again in an area the dog knows e.g. in the house or garden before progressing to outside the home.

Maintaining Motivation

Use high value food rewards. Randomly throw in easy ones on all the tasks e.g. shorter tracks, easier to find hiding places and randomly using more food on a trail. By keeping the dog guessing when the reward will be reached, their motivation will remain high.

References

David Ryan, APBC conference, 'nose' no bounds, 12th March 2012.