

Advanced training: Button push

Teaching your dog to a 'button push' can aid with interrupting repetitive behaviours, supporting with transitions between activities, relationship building, and even speech and language skills. 'Button push' is part of advanced training achieved by gradually 'shaping' the behaviour. This guide will take you through step by step.

Before you start

It is important to desensitise and introduce your dog to the sound the button will make. It may play a tune, make a noise, or have pre-recorded voice audio. Muffle the sound for the first few times, and treat your dog to build positive associations. You can then build up to normal volume.

It's very useful to use a clicker during this training. If you haven't introduced it already to your dog, 'load' your clicker before using it — have lots of treats and over a couple of short sessions simply click and treat and keep repeating this. Some dogs will get the hang of this quicker than others. Once your dog is hearing the click then looking for the treat, you know they have made the association and you are ready to start using it as a training aid. For more information please see the **'Clicker Training & Shaping'** handout.



You will need:

- Treat bag and treats
- Target board (wooden, paper, or card circle with a clear cross on)
- Clicker
- Pre-recorded button



Remember to only do a maximum for 3 minute training sessions and only progress to the next step when your dog is ready to do so, no matter how long it takes!

Step 1

Place the target on the floor and as soon as your dog is showing any interest in it, click and treat. At this stage, you wouldn't be expecting your dog to use their paw, so mark and reward simply looking or sniffing around it. If your dog is not showing an interest you can either:

- Put a treat on top or just over the target and click as they go to eat it
- Move the target around to get your dog's interest and engagement with the new item

Do this a couple of times then throw a treat away from the target and see if they come back and start to show even more interest in it.

Step 2

Once your dog has understood they are being rewarded for something to do with the target, hold off with the click. You should allow your dog to explore the target more and just click for foot movement around or on the target. This can be encouraged by throwing the treats over the target, capturing any accidental movements towards it to begin with. Repeat this until the dog realises they are being rewarded for having their foot on the target.

Step 3

Once the foot is hitting the board consistently, hold off with the click and only reward when the paw is hitting directly onto the cross. You should make sure this is consistent before moving onto step 4.

Step 4

Next, place the button on top of the target board and you may have to repeat step 1 and reward for any interest shown in it. Build this up again, holding off from the click, until your dog is using their paw. If your dog is not hitting the button at this stage, it doesn't matter, as long as they are hitting the board. You will have changed the criteria, therefore your expectations need to be lowered.

Step 5

When your dog is hitting the board with their paw, you should eventually hold off with the clicks, until your dog is pushing down on the button. Repeat this step until the button is being pushed consistently.

Step 6

The target board underneath can then be removed and the button placed on the floor. Again, you may have to repeat step 1 and if your dog misses initially but is hitting around the button, reward. This is due to the criteria changing again. Eventually hold off with the clicks, only rewarding when your dog is pushing down on the button. After repeating, your dog should hit the button exactly in the middle, to get the desired target every time.

Step 7

When you have a finalised behaviour, you can add your verbal cue. Simply say 'push' (or another desired cue) whilst your dog is pushing down, and repeat to build associations.

Step 8

When your dog is 'pushing' after being asked with the verbal cue, and you are confident your dog will do this every time, you can start getting your dog involved with the children and asking to push the button in varying situations. You are now ready to go!

