

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TRAINING

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POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT TRAINING

Dogs don't care about money. They care about praise...and food. Positive reinforcement training uses praise and/or treats to reward your dog for doing something you want him to do. Because the reward makes him more likely to repeat the behavior, positive reinforcement is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your dog's behavior.

Rewarding your dog for good behavior sounds pretty simple, and it is! But to practice the technique effectively, you need to follow some basic guidelines.



TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement.

The reward must occur immediately -within seconds– or your pet may not associate it with the proper action. For example, if you have your dog sit but reward him after he's stood back up, he'll think he's being rewarded for standing up. Using a clicker to mark the correct behavior can improve your timing and also help your dog understand the connection between the correct behavior and the treat.

KEEP IT SHORT

Dogs don't understand sentences. "Daisy, I want you to be a good girl and sit for me now:" will likely earn you a blank stare.

Keep commands short and uncomplicated. The most common dog commands are:

- Watch me
- Sit
- Stay
- Down (which means lie down)
- Off (which means "get off of ____)
- Stand
- Come
- Heel
- Leave it



CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Everyone in the family should use the same commands; otherwise, your dog may be confused. It might help to post a list of commands where everyone can become familiar with them.

Consistency also means always rewarding the desired behavior and never rewarding undesired behavior.

WHEN TO USE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

The good: Positive reinforcement is great for teaching your dog commands, and it's also a good way of reinforcing good behavior. You may have your dog sit before letting him out the door, before petting him, or before feeding him. Give him a pat or a "good dog" for lying quietly by your feet, or slip a treat into a Kong type toy when he's chewing it instead of your shoe.

The Bad: be careful that you don't inadvertently use positive reinforcement to reward unwanted behaviors. For example, if you let your dog outside every time he barks at a noise, you're giving him a reward (access to the yard) for behavior you want to discourage.

SHAPING BEHAVIOR

It can take time for your dog to learn certain behaviors. You may need to use a technique called shaping, which means reinforcing something close to the desired response and then gradually requiring more from your dog before he gets the treat.

TYPES OF REWARDS

Positive reinforcement can include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. Treats should be highly desired, and bite size. Each time a treat is given, couple it with a verbal reward (praise).

WHEN TO GIVE TREATS

When your pet is learning a new behavior, reward him every time he does the behavior. This is called continuous reinforcement. Once your pet has reliably learned the behavior, you can switch to intermittent reinforcement, in which you continue with praise, but gradually reduce the number of times he receives a treat for doing the desired behavior.