



Basic Training Ideas for Your Foster Dog

The cornerstone of the Our Companions method of dog training is to work on getting a dog's attention. We use several exercises to practice this. Several are highlighted in the exercises below. Some of the other exercises illustrated below were chosen because they work on teaching the dog impulse control. Many dogs come to us without any training, so it is up to us to teach them good manners.

Some things to have handy when training and bonding with your dog are small pieces of food rewards that are highly palatable and easily tolerated by most dogs. Natural Balance Roll, cut up chicken, string cheese, and Charlee Bear treats are some good ones to pack and bring with you. We will inform you if the dog you are fostering has any known food allergies or sensitivities. It's also a good idea to have a bait bag or carpenter apron so that your treats will be easily at hand while you train your dog. We will supply Martingale Collars and Identification tags, and some dogs will come to you with a harness. If you have a favorite leash that you like to use, feel free to use that. Just please be sure it is in good repair and the clip is secure. There is a climbing rope leash available from www.sitstay.com which has a clip that locks. It is made by Ruff Wear, and is a wise investment.

Above all, have fun with your dogs while you are fostering, and feel free to teach them new tricks and behaviors. The owners will be so pleased to get back a well trained dog!

The "Attention" information below is the first handout that we give to our clients:

How Do I Get My Dog's Attention?

Attention Games

Having your dog's full attention is the cornerstone to positive training. Without it we cannot train the dog. The following exercises will ensure that your dog will learn to focus his attention on you rather than other dogs, cars, or anything else that may cause him to stop listening to you. You need your dog's attention to begin training.

Begin training in the kitchen or some other area where your dog finds you interesting and there are few distractions. Gradually move to other locations in the house and then head outside to introduce more distractions. In more distracting situations, you will want to use higher value reinforcements.

Conditioning the Marker Word "YES"

During the first week, you will need to condition the dog to the word "YES". You only need to do this exercise once, and then you can begin using the word "YES" to mark the good behaviors that you see your dog doing.

Have 10 treats in your bait bag, say the word “YES”, and give your dog a treat. Repeat this for 10 times. Do not worry if your dog is sitting, standing, looking at you, laying down etc. You are simply training a good association with the word “YES” and having something good happen. From now on, you can begin to use “YES” as a signal to your dog that s/he has done something good and a reward is coming.

Play the No Name Game

Watch your dog over the next week. Whenever you notice him giving you quiet attention, mark the behavior calmly with the word “YES”, and quickly reward with your attention, a touch, praise, a part of his meal, or a toy.

Play the Name Game

When you are in a quiet area, call your dog’s name one time only, clearly, using a quiet voice. When he looks at you, say “Yes!” and reward him with a treat. If he doesn't look at you when he hears his name, make clicking sounds with your tongue, or try hiding on him or try getting out his favorite toy and tossing it in the air. Ignore him if he tries to join in the game. Produce something yummy and eat it yourself or at least pretend to. Be CREATIVE. Make it worth his while for him to look at you.

Repeat this five or six times a day. If your dog jumps up on you, immediately lose interest in him. Turn your back and withhold reward. The instant his feet are on the ground say “Yes” and reward. The same thing goes for demand barking. Positive Training does not mean that your dog will become a brat. Simply do not reward any pushy behaviors and your dog will learn to be well behaved and patient.

Training Tip

You should begin to see a substantial increase in your dog's attentive behavior, especially when he hears his name. If you are not seeing improvement, make sure that you are not using his name to scold him. Make sure that you are not nagging him and saying his name over and over.

Summary of Attention Games:

Name game

Say your dog’s name.
The moment he responds...mark it with “yes” and then treat

Name game with eye contact

Say the name
Wait for eye contact
“Yes”then treat

No name game

Wait for your dog to offer eye contact, mark it (“yes”), treat

No name game with distraction—add in the dog’s name once they learn the exercise

Hold a treat away out at arm’s length
Just wait for the dog’s eye contact
Mark it “yes”then treat

Touch or Targeting

Touch or Targeting --Teaching your dog to target your hand

Desired Result

The dog sees the handler put their hand out, or hears the word “touch” and turns his head to touch his nose to the handler’s hand. This brings the dog back to attention on the handler while providing a distraction that is fun for the dog. This game becomes self-rewarding for many dogs resulting in many dogs needing very few food rewards for playing along.

Intermediate steps and training suggestions

1. We use this with reactive dogs that tend to lock onto people or other dogs. By asking them to play the game, you can provide another acceptable behavior to take the place of their normal reaction. You also start changing the dog’s emotions associated with his triggers.
2. Begin to train it by putting a hand out, waiting for a nose touch, marking it with a “yes” and then giving a treat. For dogs that don’t touch the hand at first, the treat can be put behind the hand and then delivered to the dog once he touches the hand. For dogs that don’t understand what we are asking, you can put the treat between your fingers and then mark the nose touch with a “yes” and give them the treat from between the fingers.
3. Be sure to vary your hand placement slightly, and be sure to use both hands so that the dogs don’t get patterned into thinking that the hand will always be in one position.
4. Once the dog is reliably touching his nose to the hand, then it can be named—usually “touch”.
5. At this point the dog can start touching the hand multiple times for one food reward.

“Say Please”

This is a training exercise that uses something called “shaping”. We accept certain behaviors in the beginning. Then we look for better and better things from our dogs. It also is a great exercise to help with impulse control. We use this exercise as a foundation for teaching “stay” later on.

What to do:

- Have 5 small pieces of food handy.
- You may ask your dog for a “sit” or a “down”.
- Place food on the floor but be ready to cover it with your hand so your dog doesn’t snatch the pieces.
- Keep it covered with your hand, if necessary, and wait for your dog to offer an appropriate behavior.
- Reward anything short of stealing the food at first.
 - (i.e., backing away from the food, holding the sit, going back into a sit, waiting)
- Gradually expect more appropriate behaviors and wait until you receive them.

Eventual goal: Your dog waits patiently for the reward and offers eye contact.

Things to remember:

- Mark the appropriate behaviors with a “yes” when they occur.
- Remember to release your dog with your release word right after you give the last bit of food. This is important for teaching “stay” later on.

Sit

Skill: Sit

Practice the proper sequence:

- Ask for a sit (use a hand signal or lure if necessary)
- Mark the sit with “yes” the moment the butt hits the floor
- Treat (only used until the dog is proficient at the sit command)
- Release word
- Treat

Desired Result

When the dog is asked to sit (with or without a hand signal), the dog puts his butt on the floor and stays until you say the release word (when in doubt use “okay” or “all done”). The dog doesn’t get up until he hears the release word.

Intermediate steps and training suggestions:

1. It helps to have the dog’s attention before asking him to sit. Use the Name Game to get the dog’s attention before asking him to sit—he will be much more compliant when he is paying attention to you!
2. Stand straight and tall when requesting that the dog sit—leaning over the dog can stress the dog and he may become unable to comply with your request.
3. Many times you can step in front of the dog if he is noncompliant with the request to sit. Crowding the space in front of a dog often causes it to sit.
4. For dogs that won’t hold the position and quickly bounce back up, deliver several treats in a row to get the dog to draw out the behavior. Then give the release word.

Down

Skill: Down— The dog lies down on the ground with his elbows and butt on the floor.

Desired Result

Person says “down” or gives the downward hand signal and the dog willingly and happily places himself in the down position.

Intermediate steps and training suggestions

1. Have your dog in a sitting position. Put a piece of food in your hand and lure the dog in an “L” pattern down from the dog’s nose and along the floor. Don’t go too fast at first, and wait for the shoulders to drop as you move the food away from the dog. Once the dog is fully on the floor, mark with good behavior with the word “yes” and place the treat on the floor.
2. Another method is to have the dog go under a chair, your bent legs or another low item so that they get the idea of lowering themselves onto the floor.
3. Many small dogs do not like to lie on the floor; sometimes a towel or bed will help encourage the dog to lie down. Some small dogs never learn to lie down. Let your instructor know if this is a priority for your dog to learn.
4. The reason that we lure the dog with food and don’t force the dog into the down position by pushing on their shoulders or rump is because a dog ceases learning if they are forced into a position. They must learn to do the movements on their own so that they develop the necessary muscle memory needed to do it by themselves.

5. The reason that the food gets put on the floor when the dog is in the correct “down” position is to prevent him from following your hand upward and releasing himself from the “down”. As your dog gets proficient at doing a Down, you can start to signal with an empty hand and deposit the food on the floor with the other.
6. Remember to use your release word when you want your dog to get up.
7. Later we will teach the dog to down directly from a stand. Practice from time to time asking your dog to Down while you are standing, and use the downward sweep with your hand. Many dogs will learn to down from a stand as a natural progression through time.

Fun Tricks You Can Train Your Foster Dog to Do!

Trick training is a great way to exercise your foster dog’s mind while they spend time with you. The easiest way to teach most tricks is by using a clicker and some food lures. For more information on clicker training and trick training contact us, or see: www.clickertraining.com.

Bow
Roll Over
Wave/Shake
Weave (through Poles or your Legs)
Walk on their Back Legs
Spin
Catch
Retrieve
Sit Up
Speak
Nod Head Yes
Shake Head No
Distance Work
Go to Your Bed
Back Up
Go Sniff/Go Swim
Bang, You’re Dead
Shame/Say Your Prayers
Cross Your Paws (act like a Lady)
Find It
Patty Cake
Hugs
Kisses

Useful Foundation Behaviors

Some of these foundations behaviors are best taught with a clicker:

Touch with Nose (to hand or other target item)
Lifting a Paw
Moving Feet
Holding a Sitting Position
Holding a Lying Down Position
Comfortable with touching all parts of their bodies
Basic Obedience Behaviors such as Sit, Down, Stay, Release
101 things to do with a Box