

POSITIVE TRAINING GUIDE



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POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT, WHAT IS IT?

The dolphin gets a fish for doing a trick. The worker gets a paycheck for working. The dog gets a piece of chicken for returning when called. The cat gets comfort for sleeping on the bed. The child gets dessert for eating her vegetables. What is rewarded will be repeated.

A **primary** positive reinforcer is something that the animal does not have to learn to like such as food, the chance to mate, the chance to engage in instinctive behaviors i.e. chasing prey, and for social animals, the chance to interact with others.

A **secondary** positive reinforcer is something that the animal has to learn to like. The learning can be accomplished through Classical Conditioning. A paycheck is an example of a secondary reinforcer for people.

Animal trainers will often create a special secondary reinforcer they call a **bridge**. A bridge is a stimulus that has been associated with a primary reinforcer (such as food) through Classical Conditioning. You can classically condition a clicker by clicking it and delivering a desirable treat, many times in a row. You can also condition a word such as YES in the same way. Animals that have learned a bridge react to it almost as they would to the reward that follows. More about the use of a bridge later...

Advantages to using Positive Reinforcement:

- Positive reinforcement is at the core of learning since it **teaches dogs how to earn rewards through their good behavior** i.e. what behaviors will be rewarded.
- Positive Reinforcement **builds passive control in a headstrong dog**, by motivating him to cooperate, even off-leash. This is a wonderful training technique for high energy and high drive dogs.
- Positive reinforcement training **builds confidence** in a shy or fearful dog.
- Clicker-type Positive Reinforcement training **increases a dog's problem solving ability**.
- The more time you put in, the more success you'll enjoy, but at the same time, keep training sessions short 15 minute sessions two or three times a day.
- End on a high note EVERYTIME!
- Use a normal, even quiet voice when training. Your communication should be positive.
- Don't get frustrated—we hear a lot of folks saying “my dog is stubborn, out of control, and driving me crazy!” Try to reframe your view of your dog. Say to yourself: “My dog is determined, energetic, and full of personality.” Take advantage of these drives during training and teach your dog how to win the rewards he or she wants!
- Say your commands once.
- In time you will become very attuned to your dog and vice, versa, and your bond will grow and develop in ways you never imagined!



- Be generous with your food rewards. However make sure your treats are small in size (a little goes a long way.) More about tempting treats later.
- Be PATIENT, CREATIVE and KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR!

TRAINING TIPS

- Make sure to reinforce behaviors that you like and want to increase. Ignore the behaviors that you want to decrease.
- Make sure your dog loves the type of reinforcement that you are using.
- Keep your sessions short and interesting. Always end on a positive note!
- Use a bridge -- a word or sound that means "You're Right, a Treat is Coming!" -- At the split second your dog does what you want. Yes! or a clicker are examples of good bridges.
- Use a lure -- it allows you to show your dog what to do without physically touching, forcing or using the leash to push or pull him into position.
- Make sure to phase out the lure as soon as possible.
- Train your dog to target your hand...more about that later!
- Decide on a release word. Examples of release words are "Okay", "All Done", "Break" to signal that the dog allowed to move from the position or activity in which he was engaged.

TRAINING TREATS

What does YOUR dog find rewarding? Dogs are all individuals, with their own unique preferences. What one dog finds reinforcing can be boring to another. So what kind of training rewards should you use? Sometimes the difference between a brilliant obedience pupil and a dog who completely ignores you is just a matter of discovering which treats YOUR dog finds rewarding.

In general soft treats are best -- something the dog can swallow without taking his attention off of you. Most dogs have to drop their heads in order to chew hard treats like biscuits and leave behind crumbs that they are eager to clean up. Soft treats manufactured for dogs often contain large amounts of chemicals, dyes, sugar and salt--staying away from commercial dog treats is an excellent idea.

Try some of these tested favorites -- but remember, just because you think it sounds good doesn't mean your dog will love it -- trying each of the following will let you know which items your dog finds really rewarding, and which are only so-so.



Ideas for training treats:

- String Cheese, cheddar cheese cubes, Swiss cheese
- Chicken or Turkey*
- Bacon*
- Liver*
- Natural Balance roll
- Roast Beef, Bologna, chicken Breast (have the deli clerk slice you a 1" thick piece that you can cut into chunks)
- Dog Joy refrigerated treats
- Merrick, Zukes, Wellness and other companies all make high quality dog treats

*note - because you will be carrying treats in your pockets and handling them frequently, you should make sure that all meat items are properly cooked and safe for human consumption.

It doesn't matter if you are training a Great Dane or a Chihuahua remember use small pieces of food no bigger than a dime.

When your dog earns a BIG reward we call this a **Jackpot**. A Jackpot consists of a stream of small pieces of food given to the dog one after the other. We often use Jackpots when a dog comes when called, or when we are fading off the lure and waiting for the dog to make the correct choice. More about that in the training described elsewhere...

GOOD TRAINERS ARE GOOD AT REINFORCING.

They are:

1. **QUICK:** Precise timing is the key to successful training.
2. **GENEROUS:** They use lots of reinforcements.
3. **UNPREDICTABLE:** They vary when, how much and how they reinforce.
4. **VARIABLE:** They use many different reinforcements

A WORD ON YOUR VOICE

The tone of your voice is very important:

Women have an easier time reaching the high pitched, soft, falsetto tone used to let the dog know he did something good—we call this the "Good Dog" tone.

Men have an easier time with the "Command" tone - the one that is neither good nor bad, but has a firm (usually lower) tone. Many people have a difficult time getting their dogs to obey their "Command" tone of voice. Often it is because they "tell" their dogs in the form of a question: "staaaaayyyyy?" -- With a voice raising at the end of the command.

Remember, commands must be firm, short, and to the point, with the tone going down at the end, never letting the word drag on.



GETTING STARTED

1. First, you need to introduce a bridge word. Decide on a simple word or sound you will use to tell your dog she is correct and the reward is coming.
2. Pick a place with no distractions and say your bridge word or sound. Immediately give the dog the treat, Repeat this 10 to 20 times until she is looking at you in anticipation every time she hears the bridge.
3. Example of a bridge word is “Yes”.
4. An excellent time to teach this is when you are hand feeding a portion of your dog’s meal.
5. You will now use your bridge at the split second she does something correctly. Remember, GOOD TRAINERS are quick!

ATTENTION GAMES

1. Watch your dog over the next week. Whenever you notice him giving you quiet attention, reinforce him calmly with your attention, a touch, praise, part of his meal or a toy. Completely ignore any pushy or rude attention. We call this the “No Name Game”.
2. 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, instantly use your bridge word while he continues to look. Reward with tiny pieces of a treat, part of his meal or favorite toys. Repeat this at least five or six times a day. We call this the “Name Game”
3. If your dog jumps up on you, immediately lose interest in him. Turn your back and withhold reward. The instant his feet are back on the ground, continue your verbal praise and reward him.
4. As soon as your dog begins to understand the game, keep rewards hidden in your pocket. Produce the reward as soon as he comes and looks at you. Vary your rewards...sometimes food, sometimes toys, sometimes games, sometimes rubs. Be as variable as you can be. Keep your dog guessing about what type of reward he will receive.
5. If he doesn't look at you when he hears his name, try hiding on him or try getting out his favorite toy and throwing it in the air. Ignore him if he tries to join in the game.
6. Begin training in the kitchen gradually move to other locations in the house and then head outside to introduce more distractions.



7. You should begin to see a substantial increase in your dog's attentive behavior, especially when he hears his name. If you do not see improvement, make sure that you are not using his name to scold him or using his name excessively similar to nagging him.

THE LURE

How to Use it and Lose it!

1. Put a treat in your hand so that your dog can see it. Use your hand to lure your dog into the position you want. When he is in the correct position, immediately use your bridge and then give him the treat.
2. When he is reliably performing the behavior you want, continue to use the lure signal, but no longer have food in your hand. Use your bridge word, surprise him and have the treat come from somewhere new...treat him from your other hand, from your pocket, from another family member, from a counter top, or from a cabinet. Start varying the types and the amount of reward you are using. Sometimes food, sometimes a toy or a game, sometimes access to outside or to the car...sometimes a small reward and sometimes a big one. Remember, GOOD TRAINERS are quick, unpredictable, variable and generous too!
3. Now, continue to use this hand motion as your signal to get the behavior. If he performs the behavior, use your bridge word and give him a special reward and be very generous. If he doesn't respond, drop your hand to your side, wait a few moments. If he still doesn't respond, ignore him for a little bit and then try again. Do not punish or correct the dog if she doesn't respond the way you would like. Be patient.

SIT

1. Hold a soft treat in your fingers and lure your dog into a sit by slowly moving the treat over the dog's head until he sits. As he sits use your bridge and reward him. Give your release word before he gets up.
2. When he has mastered the skill enough to sit quickly, continue to have food in your lure hand, but when he sits don't give it to him. Use your bridge, but reinforce with a rub. You are beginning variable reinforcement. Give him a treat from your other hand, throw a ball, release and let him go outside...use your imagination.
3. Now lure him into a sit with no treat in your hand. This is now your sit signal. If he sits, bridge and give him a BIG reward (Jackpot). If he doesn't sit, ignore him. Wait a little bit and try again. Wait quietly a little while after giving your signal. Give him time to make a right choice. Make sure that your reward is noticeably better than when you use a lure.
4. When your dog is responding consistently to your hand signal you can add a verbal signal. Say,



"SIT", **hesitate a second** and give your hand signal. Gradually hesitate a little longer between signals. Soon your dog will start responding to your verbal signal. Now you can use either signal when you want your dog to sit.

5. By using your release consistently before your dog moves from the sit, you are actually beginning to teach stay! Watch your dog closely and try to anticipate when he is going to break position. Continue to keep your dog sitting for longer periods by reinforcing with small treats, or praise while the dog remains sitting.
6. Encourage your dog to tolerate and enjoy hugs and pats while he is sitting. Use lots of reinforcement to reward his successes. If he tries to get up, use your hands to help him remain sitting. Stop reinforcing until he is sitting willingly. Remember to release and briefly ignore after every sit.
7. You can practice many times a day, but keep your sessions short.

DROP IT, OUT, GIVE OR TRADE ME—COOPERATIVE PLAY

"Drop it", "Out", "Give", or Trade Me is another extremely important command. Just imagine your puppy or adult dog sneaking away with one of your slippers in his mouth! You calmly say "Drop It" and he releases the item on command.

Use a toy your dog is fond of but not CRAZY over. Kongs or tennis balls may work well to start. Do not try this first with high value items i.e. bones or pigs ears.

1. Choose a good size room in your house where you can close the door to make sure FIDO can't run off on you with the toys. Have your treats ready.
2. Begin to play with the toys tossing them to get his attention, make sure to use more than one toy.
3. When he has a toy in his mouth offer him a treat (show him the treat as to offer a trade), when he drops the toy, immediately use your bridge word and reward. He may pick up the toy again and start playing – that is fine. Practice this three times a day for a week.
4. This time make sure you have another toy ready in your hand. Repeat step 3, offer him the treat, when he drops the toy, immediately use your bridge word, reward and toss the other toy.
5. When he is reliably dropping the toy you can add the command you prefer such as "Drop It" or "Trade Me".
6. Once he is reliably dropping on command you can also try including this in your game of Fetch.



Allow him to bring the retrieved toy back, show him the toy in your hand. As he releases the toy from his mouth, say "Drop It" and throw the other toy for him -- this is his reward for the give. Always try to refrain from grabbing at the toy he has dropped, and always have another toy handy to toss.

7. In a few weeks you will be able to give the command and he will automatically drop the item from his mouth. Be variable with your rewards, use food, praise or toss another toy.

LEAVE IT

The world is full of interesting things to capture your dog's attention. Some of it could get him into trouble. You do not want him eating a piece of rotten food from the ground on your daily walk, or sniffing an unfriendly dog, or eating a piece of candy your child has dropped. Teaching a "leave it" is the same as teaching your toddler "don't touch". It could save your child from an accident or injury and the same goes for your dog.

1. Hold a treat in your closed fist and say "Leave It"
2. If he heads for your hand withdraw it.
3. When he looks away from your fist, use your bridge word and give him a treat **other than the one in your hand**. The dog should never get the "Leave It" item.
4. Repeat the above and this time wait until he makes eye contact with you use your bridge word and treat.
5. You can take this opportunity to say "Good Leave it" to communicate what he did was done correctly.

After a few days of practice try the exercise in your home with food on the floor, and eventually to thrown food. Have him on a leash and when he locks onto his target stand firm. Wait until he makes the choice to look at you and turn away from the food. When he does bridge and reward him. Once he has a clear understanding of the exercise you can name the behavior. "Leave it" or whatever you choose.

Another variation: (You will need another family member to play along)

Show the dog that there is food on the floor next to your helper. Walk the dog past the food and if he tries to snatch it, the helper will quickly cover and hide the food with his hands, foot, or bowl. No matter what the dog tries, he is thwarted from getting the food himself. When he chooses to leave it and turn his attention to you, use your bridge and reward generously.



RECALL

All of us want a dog that always comes when called. It is one of the most important commands to teach your dog. Having a dog that reliably comes when called could actually save your dog's life.

Unfortunately dogs are not born knowing how to come when called. The good news is that there is an effective, easy way to teach your dog to drop everything and come immediately no matter what.

When you were playing the name game with your dog (having him look at you when you say his name) you were laying the foundations for the recall. When you are in your house, if your dog is looking at you and coming to find you when he hears his name, you are not only ready to begin, on your way to a reliable recall. If your dog is not responding reliably to his name, practice the Name Game Attention Game for a week before beginning the recall.

1. Decide on a signal for the recall. It should be clear, carry a long distance and not be used for anything else. Start the signal with your dog's name. "FIDO COME NOW, FIDO COOKIE" are examples of possible recall signals.
2. Your recall signal should be unique. For the next two weeks use it only two times a day and only when the following conditions are met.
 - a. You are 100% certain that your dog will come to you. He can already be coming to you when you call or he can be very close to you, just be certain that he will come to you. Try this in areas with no distractions.
 - b. You are prepared to reward him like he just did ABOSLUTLEY FABULOUS. Reward with treats, praise, rubs, dinner, car rides, toys, games.... anything your dog loves...use your imagination! Make the reward BIG, UNFORGETTAGE, and SPECIAL.
3. Say your signal ONE TIME ONLY. As he turns towards you or starts toward you immediately reinforce with your bridge. Praise him as he comes towards you being careful not to repeat your signal.
4. When your dog comes to you, continue to talk to your dog and reward him when he is in front of you close enough that you don't have to reach for him. Prolong your reward so he will be in no hurry to leave you. Handle his collar while you continue to reward him. Before he loses interest in being with you, stop reinforcing, release him and tell him to go play.
5. Reward your dog whenever he comes to you, no matter which signal you use. Always reward him when he checks in with you during the day. Remember to never call him to you for anything that he considers unpleasant. Go and get him instead.
6. Play lots of recall games at home. Use your imagination and have fun!

Remember, use the recall two times a day for two weeks when you know he will come and you are prepared for huge rewards. You will have a dog that always comes to you when called!



THE SIT...STAY...FOR CONTROL

STAY MEANS: “DON'T MOVE FROM POSITION UNTIL I COME BACK AND RELEASE YOU.”

If you have consistently used your release to signal your dog that he may get up, he is already learning to stay.

Stay is a three part learning process: **Duration, Distraction and Distance**. Each part is worked on separately which helps the dog understand that “stay means stay”.

Basic Stay Command

Ask your dog for a “sit” or a “down”

Say “stay” in a calm tone

The most common hand signal for stay is to put your hand up like a stop sign.

Reward with a small treat

Release with your release word before your dog gets up

Gradually work on increasing the time your dog stays in position

As the time increases, treat during the stay and repeat the command calmly

Part One: In the first exercise, you are only working on **duration**. Make sure there are no distractions and that you are not moving away from your dog at all.

Part Two: Continue to work on stay with duration. Begin to separately work on stay with **distractions**. A distraction can be working in a different location inside the house or with other family members in the room. A much greater distraction is working on a stay outside.

Remember when adding distractions you must make sure not to expect a long stay (don't work on duration at the same time). Again, do not move away from your dog.

Part Three: Finally, you may work on **distance**. Initially, this should be attempted without any distractions and for very short time periods. When you first move only pick up one foot and put it back down. Reward and release your dog. Progress slowly moving to the side first as we have taught our dogs moving backwards means to come with me.

In summary, there are 3 different things you must consider when teaching stay. In the training world, they are called the 3 D's: **Duration, Distraction & Distance**

The key to training, in this instance, is to work on only one thing at a time. So if you would like to focus on distraction at first, then do not expect a long stay and do not expect to do this at a distance. Think about what you need from your dog in your daily life and focus on that. You may never have use for an especially long stay or a stay with distance. You can tailor this training to your own needs.



DOWN...DOWN STAY

Down...Stay...is the most useful control exercise that we teach. Dogs can and do spend long periods of time lying down anyway, so it is the exercise we use when we need control over a long period of time. Select some treats that your dog really likes and put them in your right hand. Kneel beside your dog with him on your left. This can be taught with your dog in a sitting position or standing position.

Show your dog the treats in your right hand. Bring the treats up to his nose but don't let him have them. Bring your hand slowly down to the floor a couple inches in front of your dog's feet. The movement is a slow lure keeping your dog connected. Once your dog's nose is next to his feet move the treat slowly on the ground in front of the dog. The dog should stretch out to follow the treat and fold into a down. Mark the moment with a Yes or Click.

DON'T SAY ANYTHING! JUST WAIT...he can sniff and lick your hand but don't let him have the treat.

It may take a bit of time but he will lay down to get at the treat in your hand. When he does...open your hand immediately...give him the treats and praise enthusiastically!!!

Before he gets up on his own, give him the release signal. Repeat a few times until he gets the idea. Remember to say nothing until he is lying down.

Work to keep your dog lying down for longer periods of time. Praise him quietly for staying down, give him small pieces of treat, and pat him in his favorite spots. If he insists on getting up, release him...and ignore him.

When he is going down dependably, no longer put the food in your right hand. Continue to use your right hand to signal him to lie down, but give him his reward after he is down. Remember to be variable with your reinforcement...sometimes a bunch of treats, sometimes a good ear rub, sometimes lots of praise and a treat...keep him guessing!

When he is going down dependably you may add a verbal signal...Spot...Down...or whatever you wish. Give the verbal signal first and then the hand signal.

To elongate the Down into a Stay, continue to reward the dog at random intervals, but do not use your release word. At first reward for short stays, and through time gradually increase the time between rewards and the length of time you want them to stay down. This skill takes time to teach. Eventually you can put the stay on command and we usually use a signal with the palm toward the dog to indicate that you wish them to remain in place.



LOOSE LEASH WALKING

There are several methods to teach a dog to walk on a loose leash. We work on many of them in our Family Companion 1 class, and continue the skill in Family Companion 2. Below is one method for teaching the skill.

The leash is the connection between you and your dog and allows the two of you to go out in public together. Whether you are out for a walk or just standing still, neither you nor your dog should be pulling on the leash. Your leash is a training aid and a piece of safety equipment. To be an effective training aid, it should never be tight and should be used as little as possible.

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS: The first thing you want to do is EXERCISE him. Loose leash walking training is best done when your dog is tired.

1. Prepare your dog to go for a walk. Put on his leash. If you want him to walk on your left side, put the leash in your right hand. Leave your left hand free to reinforce him.
2. If he starts pulling, stop at this point and turn into a statue. Wait as long as it takes for him to settle. It's best to be patient and wait for him to turn on his own, but if he's taking forever, say his name (if you've been doing your attention work he'll turn around for that). Praise and continue walking forward.
3. If he starts to pull ahead without you, or becomes distracted by something in his environment ask for moving attention. Back up briskly. When he is following you attentively, reinforce him and begin moving forward.
4. Reinforce attention and all attempts he makes to keep the leash loose. Be generous!
5. If he charges out to the end of the leash, stop and turn into a statue. Repeat step 2 above.
6. When he is attentive again, repeat step 3. Continue this procedure for the remainder of your walk. You make no forward progress if the leash is tight. When the leash is loose, you reward your dog by continuing the walk and giving him praise, treats and pats.

Some dogs get the concept quickly, others have the pulling habit ingrained so well they have a more difficult time. They are not stubborn, just well trained pullers!! Eventually, though, your dog will figure out that pulling no longer gets him where he wants to go. Now, to get there he must *not* pull.

IN CLOSING...

The relationship between you and your canine companion has the potential to be one of the most loving and rewarding relationships in your life.

Just remember the keys to good training: patience, consistency, and generous rewards. Every effort you put forth in training and understanding your dog will be returned to you again and again.



A word on the Our Companions Training Classes:

All of Our Companions Training Classes use positive reinforcement training methods. The classes will help your dog learn good manners and obedience skills. Taking your dog to a positive training class also builds your relationship with your dog and provides a safe environment for your dog to learn and practice good behavior. More information regarding Our Companions Training Classes can be found on the Our Companions website under the Dog Training Link.

Thank you for adopting your friend. Please contact us at Our Companions if you ever need further advice or assistance.

CREDITS

Our Companions Training Guide was created through the contributions of several volunteer trainers and was edited by Canine College Coordinator Deanna Nickels, and Canine Operations Director Marie Joyner.

Some content was reproduced from:

- Operant and Classical Conditioning: Stacy Braslau-Schneck & -Tails-U-Win! Training Center: Leslie Nelson