Applying reward-based training to daily life- It's SO easy!

Everyday Training - Easy ways to prevent behavior problems

Without even using cues, you can mold your dog’s behavior to be almost always GOOD!

So many people don’t know what it means to reward a good behavior. They are waiting for a good behavior to occur, and they don’t recognize it when it happens. Or, they just EXPECT dogs to somehow be good, and don’t realize that they won’t keep seeing good behaviors if those behaviors go unrewarded. Basically, any behavior that is not a BAD behavior, is a rewardable good behavior. Here is a list to help you know what to look for and what to reinforce with rewards and attention (that would be the bold text.) I list the good behavior and how it can eliminate or prevent a “bad” behavior (in parenthesis):

**Sitting** (the act of not jumping up)

**Being Quiet** (the act of not barking)

**Eye Contact** (giving you attention; the act of not “ignoring” you)

**Going to the bathroom outside** (the act of not peeing and pooping in the house)

**Walking on a loose leash** (the act of not yanking your arm out of the socket)

**Coming to you for any reason** (the act of not running away from you, or avoiding you)

**Lying still** (the act of not racing around like a maniac, jumping, pulling on the leash, or barking)

**Bringing you anything** (the act of not playing keep away) Even if it’s your Rolex! Wouldn’t you rather have him bring it to you than sneak out the doggie door and bury it in the back yard?

**Giving you anything** (trusting you; the act of not resource guarding)

**Coming or staying** near you (keeping tabs on where you are; the act of not wandering off)

If you reward the above behaviors (bold text) with your attention and something the dog likes, you’ve just taught your dog to Come, Sit, Down-Stay, Heel, Retrieve, Not Jump and Not Bark, and you didn’t even have to take an obedience class or even use training equipment. All you have to do is watch for one of these 10 behaviors to occur, and pop a treat in the dog’s mouth. This is just TOO SIMPLE, and yet so many people fail to do it and end up with the “dog from hell.”

How do you reward or reinforce these behaviors? You can use anything that is pleasing to the dog. Praise alone doesn’t mean much to a dog unless it is followed by food. Most dogs respond well to small (very small) tidbits of soft-moist dog treats. Lots of dogs value a play session, or a chance to retrieve a toy even more than a treat. Use what your dog likes. If you see the dog performing the rewarded behavior more regularly, that means it is working. Remember when he’s engaged in one of the behaviors on the list, he is NOT committing one of the incompatible “crimes” (opposite behaviors).

Some people think that they would have to be feeding their dog all the time, to do this type of training. Well, I ask you, would you rather be punishing your dog all the time? Because if you don’t reward the listed behaviors, THEY WILL GO AWAY and be replaced by self-reinforcing behaviors, like barking, digging, running and chasing things. A dog will only perform behaviors that are productive for him. You can’t EXPECT a dog to know to be good. Telling him he is good by rewarding with a treat or an unexpected play session is a great way for him to form positive associations with those behaviors. And he will want to perform those rewarded behaviors ALL THE TIME!

You don’t have to feed your dog for every breath he takes for his entire lifetime. Once you have formed good HABITS, they are hard to break. Just as once bad habits are formed, they are equally hard to break. So, it pays you to do it right the first time. REWARD those simple behaviors that you’ve been taking for granted! Open your eyes and open your treat bag! What you reward is what you’ll get.

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