

57 Dog Behavior and Training

Learning, Training, and Modifying Behavior - Synopsis █

How can I teach my dog new tasks?

- Be positive. Engage in pleasant, positive interactions with your dog.
- Set your dog up to succeed. Dogs make bad choices; be prepared and set your dog up to be successful by avoiding situations where you know the dog is likely to engage in an unwanted behavior (so you don't have to rely on punishment of his failures).



- Reward and praise your dog when he does something right. Food, toys, or praise are all acceptable rewards and should immediately follow the behavior. Clicker training can be particularly effective at ensuring good timing (see (17) Working for Food, (18) Clicker and Target Training, and (21) Reinforcement and Rewards).
- Once a desirable behavior is achieved, intermittent and variable reinforcement can help to maintain the behavior over the long term.
- Punishment: an interaction designed to stop your dog from doing something.
- Effective punishment must occur during or immediately following the behavior.
- Punishment is not effective if it does not reduce or stop the behavior after the first two to three repetitions.
- Punishment should not evoke pain or fear.
- Aggression does not stop aggression.
- Punishment should play a minor role (if any) in problem resolution! (see (23) Using Punishment Effectively and (24) Why Punishment Should Be Avoided).
- Be a kind and benevolent leader, much like a parent. Dogs are not trying to dominate, “be in charge” or take over the pack. This is a myth. Ignore all recommendations designed to make you the pack leader. Never pin, hang, stare at, jab toward, or roll your dog.
- Desensitization: recreates and approximates a challenging situation but controls the intensity of the stimulus so the dog can be successful. If your dog is overwhelmed then you are teaching him to be overwhelmed (see (19) Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning and (20) Implementing Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning – Setting Up for Success).
- Counter-conditioning – If a stimulus (e.g., person, pet, noise, object) causes fear and anxiety, then counter-conditioning would be to change the association to something that is highly positive by giving a favored reward each time the pet is exposed to the stimulus.

- Response substitution: Training a new desirable behavior with the use of reinforcers to replace the undesirable behaviors.
- Practice makes perfect. Practice success; not failure. Do not let your dog practice and perfect his bad behaviors. This means avoiding situations that create the unwanted responses.
- Dog communication: watch for subtle signs of stress or anxiety. Yawning, licking, and looking away are subtle signs; growling, snapping, and biting are not subtle, but they usually signal fear, anxiety, distrust, and fear. The dog is saying: I don't like this! See (48) Canine Communication – Interpreting Dog Language.
- Dogs do not experience guilt or remorse for past deeds. They know when you are angry, upset, or disappointed and they will use dog communication (appeasement) to make you stop being angry, upset, or disappointed. They may also learn to predict in what situations you will get angry so that they communicate appeasement in anticipation of your punishment.
- Behavior modification is a gradual process; do not expect over night success or a complete cure. We look for improvement in the targeted problem, this can happen in many ways; a change in the frequency or intensity of the behavior or the duration. This is a journey; enjoy the journey with your dog. Daily regimented exercises are not required but a long-term commitment is.

This article has been co-authored by Theresa DePorter DVM, DECAWBM.