



REWARD-BASED TRAINING

The Problem with Punishment

A common misconception about the dog-human relationship is that dogs are pack animals and are motivated to achieve a higher 'status' relative to other dogs or people within a hierarchy. This idea that dogs have a desire to 'dominate' their owner has perpetuated the use of forceful, punishment-based training methods meant to 'show their dog who's boss'. Aversive methods such as force, threats, fear, pain, intimidation, physical punishment and dominance are not necessary for training a dog. In fact, punishment-based training damages relationships, breeds mistrust, and teaches dogs that humans are unpredictable. Punishment-based training tries to inhibit behavior, but does not teach the dog what is expected of him. Dogs are often punished for exhibiting natural dog behaviors that humans find unacceptable for one reason or another. Since the behavior is normal in the dog's mind, he becomes confused and sometimes defensive.

Dogs see people as social companions, not pack leaders. For these reasons, the most effective means of training a dog is through the use of reward-based training to build cooperative relationships between owners and their pets. By reinforcing, or rewarding, behaviors you like and want to continue seeing, you set your dog up for success. Instead of punishing a dog for undesirable behaviors, you ignore the unwanted behavior and/or teach incompatible behaviors.

What Is a 'Reinforcer'?

Simply put, a 'reinforcer' is a reward that makes the behavior stronger (it is *reinforced*). These can include verbal praise, a high-value treat (small pieces of chicken or hot dog), low-value treat (milkbones, kibble), access to a toy or ball – pretty much anything a dog likes. When using positive reinforcement, focus on the behavior you *want* rather than the behavior you don't want, then use treats to reinforce that behavior.

Nothing in Life Is Free

Have your dog sit before it gets meals, treats, petting, or goes outside. Any time your dog wants something from you, ask him to do something first like sit, down, or shake. Allow your dog to earn their freedoms (e.g., being unsupervised out of the kennel, being allowed on furniture, etc.) over the first few weeks, or longer if needed.

Training Classes at NHS

Enrolling in manners training classes offered by the Nebraska Humane Society (www.nehumanesociety.org/training) will help you communicate your expectations to your dog in a way that he understands. The training approach in classes should be reward based to further strengthen the trust and bond you have been building with your dog since he became part of your family.

Animal behavior questions?

Contact our FREE Behavior Helpline!

402-905-3421 | bhelp@nehumanesociety.org | www.nehumanesociety.org/behaviorhelp