

Good Behavior Spontaneously!

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Wouldn't it be great if your dog naturally offered you good behaviors all the time? Just think about life with a dog that you didn't have to nag to get them to sit, down or watch you. Is that an elusive dream? NO! It's all possible and quite easy to achieve.

To start this process, you can do a couple of things. The first way is to capture the behavior when it occurs. This basically means catch your dog in the act of doing something good, tell him something (like the word "yes" or clicking) so he knows he did it right and reinforce him (give him a treat). I prefer to use this technique whenever possible. An example – wait for your dog to sit on his own, say yes, then give him a treat. The second way is to lure the behavior. With this technique, one would use a food lure to get the dog to do the behavior, say yes, then reinforce him.

Once the dog understands how to do the behavior, you can begin to teach him to offer the behavior on his own.

For sits, begin by asking for or luring a couple of sits to "prime the pump" and then reinforcing. Now move so the dog will get up and just stand there and smile at your dog. You can talk to him, but don't cue the sit in any way. The second he sits, say "yes" and give him a treat. Repeat every time he offers the sit. The more you reinforce it the more ingrained it will become, until your dog begins to offer it as a default behavior any time he wants something or doesn't know what else to do.

For eye contact, carry some non-perishable treats around with you or stash them around your house. If your dog spontaneously gives you eye contact, say yes and give him a treat. Repeat often. For downs, repeat the same process you used for the sit. Lure a couple downs, then just wait for your dog to offer it on his own. Be sure to reinforce it when he does it. If he doesn't offer the down on his own, help him out by using your hand signal only, reinforcing when he downs. Now gradually fade your hand signal. For example, if you currently have to move your hand all the way to the floor to get your dog to down, the next time, stop your hand one inch

from the floor. The following time, stop your hand 2 inches from the floor, etc., until you don't have to indicate the down with your hand at all. This is a good spontaneous behavior to teach to dogs who jump on people.

Don't forget, reinforcement doesn't always have to come in the form of a treat, although using a treat at first will speed things up. It can be a toy, a kind word, a smile, petting, a walk, chasing a squirrel, etc. Be sure to ALWAYS REINFORCE good behavior ALL THE TIME in some way.

A word about petting your dog. 99% of dogs do not like to be petted on top of their heads initially. They usually don't mind if you come back to their heads, but most do not like the sight of your hand coming down towards their head, it's intimidating to them. You can tell whether your dog likes it or not by how he reacts as you reach your hand towards his head. Does he look away, back up, lick his lips, yawn, duck his head or run away? If you answered yes to any of these questions, your dog does not want you to pet him on top of his head. Additionally, in the winter, when it's dry and there's a lot of static electricity, if you pet the top of his head and shock him, you've not only NOT reinforced him, but you've punished him too! REMEMBER...reinforcement must be reinforcing for your dog not YOU! If your dog doesn't like it, it's not reinforcing!

It is not necessary to tell your dog to do everything. Just get into the habit of observing your dog and then reinforcing him for doing good behaviors. When you are in the habit of reinforcing his good behavior, he will no longer feel compelled to do bad things to get your attention, because doing good stuff will always pay off for him! Train yourself to be more in-tune with your dog and you and your dog will be well on your way to a loving, well-mannered and respectful relationship.