

HOW DOGS SEE THE WORLD

Like wolves, dogs are pack animals and in any wolf pack there is an alpha male and female who are seen as dominant and the leaders. Each wolf will be submissive to, and obey the wishes of, those above them in the hierarchy as long as they are still dominant over them. If they feel that they may have a chance of gaining dominance over those above them, they will challenge them and be disobedient and aggressive.

Unlike wolves, the hierarchy among dogs is not as strong or as clear cut, so relationships are more fluid and less opportunistic. Dogs consider their human companions part of their pack. They will still have a concept of dominance and submission but it changes with different circumstances and with what signals we are giving them. Most of the time, dogs see themselves as #1 or #2, usually below the top of the household. It is not always about actual dominance but more about who is in charge. In other words, who is the leader.

As most dogs are pretty tolerant and like people, this only becomes a problem if there is a conflict or disagreement. When push comes to shove, the dog who thinks they are the leader will feel justified in using whatever tools they have to get what they want and this can result in aggression. And even when it doesn't, it means that the dog is unruly and disobedient. This is usually because people don't know how to be a good leader and often don't even realize that they are not in charge.

It is very important that dogs are put in a subordinate position to all humans including children. Depending on how dominant the dog is, or more commonly, how not in charge the person is, this may be difficult. Training is a useful tool. A dog that obeys commands is recognizing the owner as the leader. Most dogs just require an owner that is an effective leader, calm, consistent, persistent and fair, that also does not allow bad behaviour. It is imperative that you establish yourself as the clear leader and you must reinforce this position every time you interact with your dog because, as far as your dog is concerned, every interaction is a training session.

A more common problem is a poorly socialized and/or fearful dog. Often one thing leads to the other. A fearful dog is anxious in strange situations or with strangers and will often resort to growling, snarling, or biting to try to remove the fearful stimulus as they don't know any other way. Training helps give a dog confidence and teaches them other behaviours that will be more appropriate. It also establishes the owner as a competent leader who the dog can trust. Being exposed to new and strange situations in a controlled manner as a puppy helps reduce fear and just as importantly, they must interact regularly with balanced dogs so they become socialized and learn proper dog interaction.

HOW DOGS LEARN

Dogs have two types of behaviours. One is instinctual, that means they are rewarded for acting on an instinct that is bred into them even if they are not successful. We must understand that we cannot train instinct out of our dogs. Some instinctual rewards are hard wired like maternal behaviour and prey catching and some we have bred into them like herding and retrieving. We discourage it and thus reduce it but we cannot eliminate it.

The other type of behaviour is learned. If a dog tries a certain behaviour and they get rewarded with food, attention, or play, then they will do it again. If they get consistent or even intermittent rewards then it becomes a learned behaviour. Remember, what we perceive as a reward is different from what a dog perceives. Any attention, even if it is negative, is usually considered a reward for a dog. If you want to encourage a behaviour then provide a reward at least some of the time, and the more often the faster it will be learned. To stop a behaviour you must eliminate the reward every single time. Removal of the reward is more effective than punishment; instead of forcing your dog to behave properly you want to have him want to do the right thing. Positive reinforcement, like providing a reward, coupled with negative punishment, or removing the reward, is the best way to train your dog.

Remember if a reward comes first then no matter what happens next, the dog has first been rewarded so the behaviour will be encouraged. Reward or absence of the reward must be IMMEDIATE so they connect it with the right behaviour. Timing is critical.

TRAINING

Training should be done regularly and for short periods of time, about 5-10 minutes, 2-3 times daily. It helps if the dog is exercised and has had the chance to eliminate before training begins so he can concentrate fully on learning. But if the opportunity comes up to teach him something then take it.

There are 2 main approaches to training. One with words and one without. Humans are very verbal but dogs are not, so the less words the better. In general, dogs respond more strongly to actions and body language than words. But sometimes one method will be superior to the other from any dog/owner combination.

If using words then say the word as you place the dog in the position you want, like sit or heel./ If they obey then reward them with food and praise immediately. If they don't obey then repeat it. Make sure you don't just keep repeating the word - you must make them do it. It is very important that your commands are simple and authoritative and that you give reward the instant they do the right thing.

If not using words, then you wait for the right behaviour or, more efficiently, encourage your dog to do a certain behaviour with a treat and then reward them. Once, they understand what you want then add in the word. This method works best with a food reward. You may use a bridging word or sound to help with timing as they will know the instant they have done the right thing and knows that a treat will follow. You must first train them that the word or sound is always coupled with a treat. Then you can use it to bridge the gap between the behaviour and getting the reward. You must do many repetitions and once they are performing consistently then you give the reward at variable intervals, never so long in between that they lose interest. Over time you can lengthen the interval until you barely need to give them any treats.

With both methods, you should start off by training in easy places with few distractions and then move on to more difficult ones. Your dog should always be listening to you during training and if not sure that they will do as you say then use another sound to get their attention so you do not train them to ignore key words. Always be sure that you are rewarding the exact behaviour that you want. Especially with the treat based training.

To train effectively you must have perfect timing, be clear and consistent with your signals and expectations and give a strong enough reward often enough. You must never get frustrated and must be very patient. Remember all interaction with your dog is teaching him something – make sure that it is good behaviour. Be persistent, consistent, and fair and your dog will be a pleasure to have and will be welcome almost everywhere.

OBEDIENCE CLASS

In this document, you will discover how your dog learns and effective ways to communicate with and train your pet. We will concentrate on the treat based learning. If you have been working with your dog on your own and not seeing results, it may not be what you are teaching but now you are teaching it. We will use positive reinforcement and negative punishment methods for training. The focus is on rewarding the correct behaviour with something your dog sees as pleasing such as play or treats. It should always be fun and exciting for you and your dog. Practice must be done daily at home. The amount of time needed for training will vary depending on your dog and you. Commit to spending 15-30 a day working with your dog to maximize what you have learned in class.

Obedience call will provide with the knowledge, confidence and tools to assist you in implementing a consistent training program to ensure success. Owning a dog is a lifelong commitment that we hope to help make rewarding for you and your pet.

COMMANDS

All exercises are done on a leash

HEEL

Start with your dog standing or sitting beside your left or right leg and lead held firmly but without tension in both hands. Say the dog's name and the firm command "HEEL" as you step briskly out with the foot closest to the dog first. Do not look at the dog and keep your own pace, not the dogs. If he lags behind that use a quick tug forward on the lead and then release. If he is forging ahead then tug backwards. In both cases repeat the command and remember to release the pressure when the dog is in the right position. The reward is a loose lead and a word of praise from you and perhaps a small treat given as you continue to walk. Once the dog is starting to get the idea then begin varying your speed and turn left and right, making sure that you spin sharply in the new direction. You can then add abrupt turns. If when you turn towards the dog they are in the way, then use your knee to bump them into position and if they are lagging behind then use a quick tug on the leash to bring them to you. Always remember to tug and then release as it is much more effective than constant pulling. Insist that your dog stay with his shoulder even with your body at all times and repeat the command as you correct them. Most important, when they are heeling nicely praise them and have the lead slack and for dogs that are more of a challenge give a small treat.

SIT

Start with your dog standing at your side and the lead loose in one hand. Say the command "SIT" and simultaneously push down on his rump with your free hand while raising your hand with the lead up. They should sit quickly and without moving sideways, backwards, or forwards. If they do not sit right away then repeat the command while still pushing down on his rump give a quick tug upward on the lead. If they do sit then praise them but make sure they remain sitting.

SIT AND HEEL

Once the dog has got the individual concepts then you can start putting them together. When heeling, every time you stop the dog should sit promptly and squarely beside you. When the dog is heeling, stop and give the command "SIT", using the aids only if necessary. Make sure they sit straight and with no delay. When they do then praise them briefly. Then say the command "HEEL" and lead off, ready to correct them if they do not move off with you.

DOWN

Start with your dog sitting beside you. Kneel down beside them with the lead in one hand. While giving the command "DOWN" push down on their shoulders and pull forward and down on the lead. It may be necessary to place their forepaws ahead of them. When they lay down then praise them briefly. When you no longer need to push the dog onto the ground then you can just pull on the lead with one hand and point to the ground with the other as you give the command. For many dogs, this is an exercise where it is helpful to use a treat to coax him forward and down rather than force them into position; so if you are having trouble then get out the treats. To return to sit, stand beside your dog and give the command "SIT" while moving your hand upwards, and if necessary a slight tug on the leash. If they stand up then keep your free hand on their rump holding it down. Remember to praise them for doing it correctly.

STAY

Start with your dog sitting beside you and the lead in on hand. Say the command “STAY” and sweep your other hand in front of their face. Then step out with your foot farthest from the dog, walk a few feet in front of your dog and turn to face them. If they come towards you then say “NO”, return them to the original position and repeat the exercise. At first be close enough that you can lean forward and give a quick tug up on the lead to stop them from getting up and say “SIT” and “STAY”. After several seconds return to the opposite side of the dog and walk around them to return to the same position you started in. Make sure that they do not move as you go around them; you must move quickly and may need to hold them in position. Slowly lengthen the distance and time. Make you always praise them once you have returned around them. This exercise can be practiced at the down as well.

COME

Start with your dog sitting beside you, give the command “STAY” and walk out and face your dog. Then say their name and in an upbeat voice say “COME”. If they do not move forward, then tug them towards you with the lead and repeat the command in an excited voice and perhaps show them a treat. If they come then praise them and ask them to sit facing you, (if you have a treat give it now), and repeat the praise. Then return them around to the heel position. Vary the length of time you wait before calling the dog. If they come before you call then say “NO” return them to the original position and repeat the exercise. Don’t always ask them to come; sometimes return to them so it is unpredictable and they must be watching and thinking. Once they get the idea then use a longer lead. Only when you are positive that they will come every time should you try the exercise off leash and always in a secure area. Praise is very important – do it every time they come.

RETURN TO HEEL

This is the finishing touch on the recall exercise. When the dog has come to you and is sitting in front of you, they must return around you to the proper heel position at your side. With the lead in your outside hand take a step backward saying the command “HEEL” and pull the dog to your outside. Then switch the lead from one hand to the other behind your back and step forward pulling the dog with you to your inside and ask them to sit beside you and praise them. Eventually you won’t have to step back and the dog should walk around you to the heel position. If they do not then pull back, switch the lead from one hand to the other behind your back and then pull forward. This exercise is a little more difficult and requires patience and maybe a treat to make it easier to learn.

All of this will take considerable time and effort, especially with some dogs, but it worth it in the end. You must be sure that everyone is doing the same thing and using the same commands and they must never get away with bad behaviour. Make sure you never give a command that you can’t enforce and everything is positive and fun. Don’t get frustrated. If you or your dog is having a bad day then do a couple of things that they do well and can be rewarded for and leave learning new things for another time. Always set up for success. Make it clear that you do not tolerate bad behaviour and only good dogs get rewarded with attention, play, and treats. Once your dog realizes what you expect and how to make you respond positively then they will try hard to please you. Remember to be a good leader: have a plan, give clear and consistent signals, and reward the right behaviour at the right time with a strong enough reward to make them do it again. Your dog reflects what you do – if you do the right thing than they will do the right thing.