

## Teaching Your Dog to Hand Target

Teaching your dog to hand target on command can be very useful to get and keep your dogs' attention in situations that may be fear or anxiety provoking.

To teach a target command you need: training treats (pea sized morsels), a quiet, distraction-free location (i.e. inside the house without other people or animals present), +/- a target stick (see below).



1. Hold an empty hand out at your dog's nose level when he sniffs it and touches your hand with his nose immediately give a treat with your other hand. After you give the treat, put that hand behind your back. You want your dog to focus on the target hand, not the hand that is giving the treats. Repeat this (hand out → dog touches → give treat with other hand) several times.

*NOTE: If your dog knows a shake command you will need to use a different hand signal than you use for shake, such as holding only 1 finger out or making a fist with your hand.*

2. After several repetitions, put your hand out and say the cue word you will be using (e.g. "touch" or "target"). Continue to repeat the process of giving a treat whenever your dog touches your hand with his nose.
3. Every dog varies in how long it takes for them to make the connection that touching your hand makes the treat appear, so be patient. If you or your dog is getting frustrated, take a break, practice a few simple commands that he already knows well and reward him for following those commands.
4. As your dog gets better and better at understanding this game, you should start to hold out your hand in locations that are a little more challenging. Start by holding your hand to one side and then to the other side. For small dogs you can also hold your hand up over his head so your dog has to reach up or jump to touch. Eventually, this can become a game where your dog has to find where you are holding out the target.

*NOTE: For small dogs and tall owners you can use a "target stick" to avoid having to bend over. Make a target stick from wooden paint stirrers or spoons by painting 1-2 inches of one end (the target) a distinct color, like blue (which is visible to dogs). Teach your dog to touch this target, rather than your hand so you don't need to bend down to offer the target.*