



Rewards:

Learning and Reinforcement

What kinds of things will a dog consider positive reinforcement?

They will differ from dog to dog. For some it may be a pat on the head, a play session, a fun toy, a walk, or a food treat. The key is to select the reward that motivates **your** pet. It can be useful to feed your dog, depending on its age, at two or three scheduled meal times. Training sessions can then be performed just prior to meal time when the dog is at its hungriest. Most puppies can then be motivated with pieces of food. In the same way, toys, play sessions and affection can be withheld until training time so that the dog is “hungrier” for these rewards. Some of the dogs that are hardest to train are those that are difficult to motivate. These dogs may do better with a few special treats that are saved specifically for training sessions (e.g. cooked vegetables, boiled chicken breast, small morsels of cheese), or pieces of dog food sprinkled with flavoring. By the way, if there’s no good reason to give your dog a treat, don’t – it fills him or her up and accomplishes nothing. Consider these tidbits and biscuits not as treats but as “training rewards.” If these rewards are saved for training they are more motivating and the pet will learn to associate the rewards with the desired behavior. Whenever you are giving the dog something of value from food to a walk, first give your dog a command so that each reward can be earned.



Rewards:

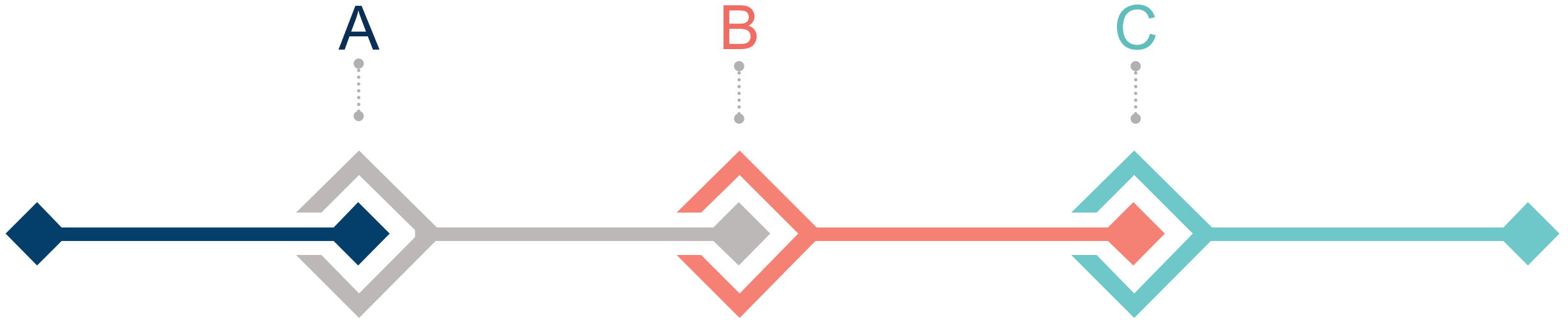
Learning and Reinforcement

How do I properly use positive reinforcement?

The proper use of positive reinforcement is more than just giving a treat or a pat on the head. The timing of the reinforcement is very important. Remember, your pet is behaving all the time. So, you need to be sure to reinforce the behavior you want and not some other. Therefore, closely associate the reinforcement with the behavior you wish to increase. Reinforcement must immediately follow the behavior. Any longer and you run the risk of the pet engaging in another behavior while you are administering the reinforcement. A good example of this is when you teach a dog to sit. You tell your dog to sit, and manipulate her into the position. While you are saying “good dog” and giving a food treat, the dog stands up. What has just happened? You have rewarded sit and stand up.

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The frequency of reinforcement is important. The rate at which behavior is reinforced is called the “schedule.” There are several different schedules of reinforcement.



Continuous reinforcement:

Each time your pet engages in a behavior it is reinforced with a reward. While this may sound like a good idea, it is actually not ideal. If you reward a behavior continuously, once you cease rewarding the behavior, it will often stop.

Ratio or variable rate of reinforcement:

The reinforcement does not come after each performance of the behavior but intermittently. This may mean that instead of a reward every time, the pet gets a reward every third time, then perhaps two in a row, then maybe not until the pet has performed the behavior five more times. What happens if you reward this way? Behavior tends to be stronger and last longer.

Switching from continuous to variable:

Start training new commands or tasks with continuous reinforcement but switch to intermittent, variable rates as soon as your pet is responding consistently.



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What if my rewards are not working?

First, you may not be reinforcing the correct task. Remember the example of sit and stand up. Be sure that the timing of your reinforcement is correct and immediately after the behavior you wish to increase. Second, you may be phasing out your reinforcement before your pet has adequately learned the new behavior. Go back to basics and be sure your pet understands what to do. Lastly, you may be repeating commands several times, or in different ways and thus confusing your pet. Ask for our handouts on training for specific tasks for additional help.

What type of rewards should I use?

Rewards do not always have to be food. For many pets, owner attention can be a reward as can a walk in the park or a game of fetch. What is important is that it be appropriate and motivating for your pet. Remember, you need not give a “special” reward such as food each time your pet performs a task, but always acknowledge good behavior if only with praise or affection.



Rewards:

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Is there a wrong way to reward my dog?

Yes. We may reinforce behaviors that we do not want. Remember, positive reinforcement makes behavior increase. So, there may be times when you actually think you are punishing your dog when you are indeed reinforcing behaviors. Examples include scolding your dog in a friendly tone of voice, or petting your dog after it jumps up on you even though you do not like jumping. Giving any form of attention to a barking dog, the dog that is jumping up, a dog scratching at the back door, or even a fearful dog, only serves to reward the behavior. Sometimes people even give a bit of food, pat the dog, or play with it in an attempt to calm it down. What they are really doing however is reinforcing the problem behavior. What is worse is that when these behaviors are rewarded occasionally or intermittently, the behavior becomes stronger and lasts longer. A reward should never be given unless it is earned.

Are rewards only used for training?

There are other situations where rewards can be most helpful. For example, it may help a puppy or even an adult dog to learn to accept new people if the greeting is always coupled with a food treat. This will help the pet learn that new people bring something good. In other cases, rewards can be used to encourage desirable behavior. Food enhanced toys may encourage a dog to chew on them instead of the household possessions.



Behavior Reinforcement

Punishment is the application of a stimulus that decreases the chances a behavior will be repeated. The key to successful punishment is to associate an unpleasant consequence with the undesirable behavior while it is occurring. Keep in mind you are punishing the behavior – not the dog. Punishment should never be considered unless the pet has the means to satisfy its nature and its needs. For example, the chewing dog should be provided with appropriate exercise and appealing toys to chew on before any attempts to punish undesirable chewing are initiated. However, if we can train our pets to do what they are supposed to and provide outlets for their needs, then it will seldom be necessary to punish inappropriate behavior.

How can punishment be used to correct behavior problems?

Physical or direct interactive punishment is likely to lead to fear of the owner and fear of the hand. Thus the use of punishment products may be more appropriate, since they are less likely to be associated with the owner and are more specific than owner intervention whether verbal or physical. Most of these devices serve to interrupt or disrupt the behavior so the dog can be directed to perform an appropriate behavior. For example, a barking dog could be interrupted with an air horn and immediately taught to approach the owners to play with a favored toy.

Behavior Reinforcement

Punishment should never be used to train a pet. The pet can be taught using lure reward methods, rewards and shaping, or prompting and rewards. It is illogical to wait until the pet misbehaves and then administer something unpleasant. Punishing the pet can lead to fear of the owner, handling or particular stimuli (approach, reaching out, pulling leash). If effective, punishment can at best stop the behavior from recurring in that location. The dog will still continue to perform the undesirable behavior in virtually any other location. Ultimately with continued punishment the pet will inhibit the behavior in the owner's presence and continue the behavior in the owner's absence. If punishment is not sufficiently unpleasant it may serve as a reward (attention). Finally, in some cases where the pet is punished then immediately rewarded (as in some training techniques), the punishment can actually become a reward, once it has been consistently paired with rewards. Therefore the only indication for punishment by the owner is for those behaviors that only occur in the owner's presence. Also, if the pet repeats the behavior after one or two applications then it is ineffective and should be discontinued.

Remote punishment (punishment administered by the owner while remaining out of sight) is a better way of teaching the pet to avoid the behavior. It takes a great deal of preparation, time and forethought. Perhaps the only practical application of punishment is to booby trap the area (environmental punishment), so that the dog is punished even in the owner's absence.

How does remote punishment work?

For remote techniques to be successful there are two key elements. First, the owner must monitor the dog while out of sight so the owner knows when the problem begins. Second, the punishment must be delivered while the inappropriate behavior is occurring (while the owner remains out of sight). Keep a close watch on the problem area while hidden out of sight (around a corner, in a nearby closet, or behind a piece of furniture). Alternately, the dog can be monitored using a video monitor, intercom, or a motion detector (such as a Tattle Tale Monitor™), which makes a loud beep whenever it is disturbed. As soon as the dog enters the area or begins to perform the undesirable behavior, use a long range water gun, noise device or remote control device to chase the dog away. A punishment device (water spray bottle, hair dryer or alarm) can be plugged into a remote control plug in the problem area. Then, as the dog enters the area or begins the inappropriate behavior, the device can be activated by remote control. If the dog cannot determine where the noise or water is coming from, it should quickly learn to stay away from the area whether the owner is present or not. The dog could also be monitored and "corrected" from a distance by leaving a long, remote leash attached, and pulling as soon as inappropriate behavior begins.



Behavior Reinforcement

What is 'direct interactive punishment' and how does it work?

If you catch your puppy engaging in an incorrect behavior, try a loud noise such as clapping your hands or a loud “uh-uh”. Remember, reprimands must occur while the behavior is happening, preferably just as it begins, and never after. Often puppies will be startled when they hear these noises and temporarily stop the behavior. At that time you need to quickly redirect the puppy to a more appropriate task. Another way to interrupt your puppy is with various types of noise devices such as a “shaker can”. Fill an empty soda can with a few pennies and tape it shut. When given a vigorous shake it makes a loud noise, which will often interrupt the puppy’s behavior. Commercial dog training devices, some which use ultrasound, are also available.

Behavior Reinforcement

How can I booby trap the environment to punish the pet?

Punishing the behavior remotely, with the owner out of sight, is impractical if the dog cannot be prevented from performing the undesirable behavior when the owner is not available to supervise and monitor. Booby traps are a way of teaching the pet to avoid the area, or the behavior itself. The most practical devices are those that are unpleasant enough to deter the behavior and reset them or remain active should the pet return to the area. One easy way to discourage a dog from entering an area where an undesirable behavior is likely to be performed (garbage raiding, chewing, entering rooms) is to make the area less appealing. Place balloons ready to pop, a pyramid of empty cans set to topple, or a bucket of water set to dump as the pet enters the area. Mousetrap type trainers, motion detectors, alarm mats, shock mats, and indoor electronic “fencing”, are also effective at keeping dogs away from problem areas. Taste deterrents might also be helpful for destructive chewing, provided they are unpleasant enough to deter the behavior. Products such as bitter apple, bitter lime or Tabasco sauce are often recommended, but many dogs do not mind or learn to enjoy the taste. A little water mixed with cayenne pepper, oil of eucalyptus, any non-toxic mentholated product, or one of the commercial anti-chew sprays often work best. To be effective, the first exposure to a product must be as repulsive as humanely possible, so that the dog is immediately repelled whenever it smells or tastes that product again. Never leave any objects or areas untreated until the dog learns to leave the object or area alone.

What should I do if I find the problem after it has already occurred?

If you find something that your puppy has done (destruction, elimination), but you did not catch him in the act, just clean it up and vow to supervise your puppy better in the future. Do not get your puppy and bring him over to the mess to yell and physically discipline him. Remember that you need to punish the behavior you wish to change. If you did not see your puppy chew up the object, all you are doing is disciplining your puppy for being present at a mess on the floor. Since that makes no sense to your puppy, your reprimands could create fear and anxiety, which could lead to aggression and owner avoidance.

If I must not punish my dog after the problem has occurred, what can be done?

Other than designing appropriate environmental booby traps, the only thing that you can do to avoid undesirable behavior is to supervise your puppy and to prevent access to potential problems when you are not available to supervise. Another option, when you are at home, is to keep a remote leash attached (preferably to a head halter) to prevent wandering off, and getting into mischief. If a problem begins to emerge while the puppy is on a leash, a quick pull on the leash will immediately interrupt the behavior. If a head halter is being used, it will immediately turn the head and mouth away from the problem area. Remember that problems such as chewing and other forms of destructiveness are part of the puppy's normal curiosity and desire to chew. Always provide suitable play objects designed to entertain your puppy so that he will not want to destroy your possessions.

Socializing your new puppy

Primary socialization

There is a sensitive period in the development of most species when they develop social attachments with their own and other species, independent of punishment and rewards. In fact, both positive and negative events seem to accelerate socialization. The events that occur during this period determine the puppy's future social partners, as well as to what species it feels it belongs. By recognizing the critical time frame in which canine socialization develops, you can help to ensure a healthy social attachment to people and other animals, including other dogs.

The primary socialization period for dogs begins at 3 weeks of age and is diminishing by 12 weeks. Peak sensitivity is at 6 to 8 weeks. Beyond 12 weeks there is a tendency to act fearfully towards new people, animals and situations. Many young dogs will regress and become fearful if they do not receive continued social interaction as they grow and develop. The 6-8 month period is another important time for socialization.

To help ensure a healthy social relationship with other dogs throughout life, dogs should maintain their social contacts with their mother and littermates until 8 weeks of age. They should continue to have regular social interaction and play sessions with other dogs after being taken into a new home. The puppy would likely do best if there was another dog in the new home, or if it had playmates in the neighborhood that it could interact with on a daily basis.

