

Appeasement Gestures

Behaviors a dog uses to ask for space or to present himself as nonthreatening. Appeasement gestures may include scratching, yawning, licking lips, play bows, turning head or body away, sniffing the ground, lifting up a paw, slowing down movement, freezing or a submissive grin. These signals are a normal part of dog interaction, but in some situations, they may be signs of stress.

Barrier Frustration

Behavior, particularly barking and lunging, that occurs when a dog is prevented by a barrier from reaching a stimulus. The barrier can be a fence or leash or anything else that blocks the dog from accessing whatever it is that is exciting or arousing him (another dog, for example).

Bite Inhibition

A dog's ability to control the amount of pressure when mouthing an object. Lack of bite inhibition may be an indicator of aggression. Indications of a dog who does not have good control over his bite may include pressure that causes bruising, bleeding or deep punctures; multiple bites in an incident; grabbing and shaking an object; or biting down and refusing to let go.

Capture

Marking and rewarding a naturally occurring behavior, such as sitting or lying down, as the dog is doing it. Once a behavior is captured, marked and rewarded, the dog learns to associate the behavior with the reward. This is the first step in teaching a dog to do a behavior on cue.

Classical Conditioning

Repeated pairings of a neutral stimulus with an unconditioned stimulus generates the unconditioned response, or one which requires no specific training. For example, the smell of food (an unconditioned stimulus) may cause a dog to salivate (the unconditioned response). Over time, the dog may learn to associate the sound of a wrapper or can opener (a neutral stimulus) with the food and may begin to salivate when he hears the noise (the unconditioned response). Eventually, the can opener or wrapper sound becomes a conditioned stimulus, one that elicits a consistent response.

Clicker Training

A form of positive reinforcement training that uses a signal, most commonly a clicker, to pinpoint correct behavior. The signal is immediately followed by a desirable reward, such as a treat, a toy or an opportunity to play. The signal helps the dog identify which behavior is earning him the reward.

Click

The action of using a marker (most often a clicker) to pinpoint a desired behavior. May also be used to describe the sound the clicker makes.

Competing Motivation

A stimulus or situation that causes conflict between what the dog desires and what the human desires from the dog. An example of this is a dog who is trained to reliably come when called not returning to his person at the dog park, because he is distracted by people and other dogs.

Compound Stressors

Events that increase a dog ' s stress level and cause him to be more on edge and prone to be reactive or upset.

Conflicted

When a dog simultaneously wants to do something and is afraid to do it. For example, a dog can be conflicted when approaching someone new: He wants to approach to smell and investigate but is afraid of the person reaching his or her hands out or bending over to pet him.

Correction

An action that stops or punishes a dog from doing an unwanted behavior. For example, a jerk on the leash. Corrections are a form of punishment and as such are not recommended as a training strategy. A number of problems, including increased anxiety, can be associated with the use of correction as a training technique.

Counter Conditioning

The process of changing a dog ' s emotional reaction to a situation from negative to positive. This is done by gradually exposing the dog to the situation in a way that does not upset him while pairing the situation with a desirable reward. The goal is to create a positive association with the situation. An example of this type of scenario is encountering another dog on a walk. Through counter conditioning, the dog can be taught that the approach of another dog is the signal for a treat, rather than the signal for uncontrolled barking and lunging.

Criteria

The standard by which a pet owner judges a behavior or the standard used to decide which behavior is acceptable and which is unacceptable. Criteria can be adjusted as needed during training in order to enable the dog to successfully learn the correct behavior.

Cue

Signal given to a dog to elicit a desired behavior. " Cue " and " command " are traditionally synonymous, but the word " command " is not commonly used in reward-based training, as it has a connotation of using force to make a dog do something. " Cue " is most often used to refer to a training situation where a dog is asked to perform a behavior and is rewarded for his success.

Default Behavior

Any behavior a dog does when he is uncertain of what else to do, particularly when he is excited or overstimulated. This may include jumping, barking or pawing. Through training, pet owners can replace an unacceptable default behavior like jumping with an appropriate default behavior like a sit or down stay.

Desensitize

Getting a dog used to a scenario that causes him distress by gradually presenting the situation in a manner that does not upset the dog.

Distraction(s)

Sounds, smells, sights and other stimuli that detract from a dog ' s ability to remain focused or perform what ' s being asked. A low-distraction environment is ideal for training.

Dominance

A dynamic, fluid relationship a dog has with another dog in a specific scenario. Dominance is not an innate personality trait but rather a means of getting preferential access to resources, including food, sleeping or resting areas, and mates. Dominance can change with different variables, including the dogs present and the resource in question.

Training methods based on the notion that owner dominance is the key to good behavior often rely on fear tactics, intimidation and pain to coerce dogs to comply. This can lead to an increased risk of aggression and bites. In many cases, dogs who are labeled as " dominant " are actually fearful, insecure and conflicted. Frequently, these dogs require a behavior intervention by a veterinary behaviorist or veterinarian working in combination with a certified professional dog trainer.

Extinction

Ending a behavior by removing reinforcement. For example, a dog barks to get his person ' s attention; if the person ignores the dog while he is barking, removing the reward of attention, that behavior ceases to be rewarding and the dog will stop barking. Extinction does not require punishment; instead, it relies on removing reinforcement of unwanted behavior.

Extinction Burst

When previously reinforced behavior no longer works to get the desired reward, pet owners may see a surge of stronger, more intense behavior as the dog makes one last effort to get the reinforcement he seeks. A dog who has been rewarded for barking may bark with more gusto when he realizes that he ' s being ignored. It is important to note that when a behavior is no longer reinforced, it can sometimes get worse — and more intense — before it fades away.

Fading the Lure

The process of taking the lure out of the training so the dog learns to do the requested behavior on another cue, such as a hand signal or word. Fading the lure teaches the canine to do the behavior without being dependent upon a treat being in the trainer's hand. To fade the lure, certain tricks can be used, such as keeping a treat in the hand doing the luring but rewarding with a treat given with the other hand. From there, progress to holding the hand shaped like it has a treat but with no treat inside. Next, gradually decrease the size of the hand movement needed to cue the behavior or shift the behavior to a new cue.

Fear-Free or Fearless Vet Visits

A low-stress approach popular in the veterinary community and other associated practices, like boarding, grooming and training, in which handling, interactions and procedures are done in a manner designed to keep the dog as calm as possible. Strategies include using handling and approaches that are less likely to induce fear, changing the environment, using medications when necessary and offering rewards to encourage willing cooperation from the dog. In every case, the goal is to keep the experience as positive as possible.

Flooding

A training approach sometimes used to force the dog to endure the situation in order to overcome any fears he may have. Though the goal is to overcome the urge to flee or fight to get away, it often causes a dog to freeze, flee or fight to get away. This extremely controversial tactic can cause major problems, including an increase in anxiety or aggression.

Functional Analysis (The ABC of a Behavior)

Functional analysis looks at three components of behavior, which are antecedent, behavior and consequence. Behavior issues can be analyzed using this approach, starting with what elicits the behavior. For a behavior like jumping on visitors, the antecedent might be a person coming through the door. The behavior is what the dog does, such as whining, jumping up and putting paws on people's arms and legs. Finally, the consequence is what happens to the dog when he jumps up, like being petted by the visitor. The ABC analysis can help identify both the problem and the solution—in this example, the petting is reinforcing the jumping, because the dog is being rewarded for his behavior.

Generalize

A behavior is considered generalized when a dog can reliably be asked to perform the specific behavior in a variety of different contexts. For example, a dog may consistently respond to a request to sit inside the house, but this behavior may not be as reliable in a different area, such as the backyard or dog park. Dogs generalize to a certain degree, but for behaviors to be reliably performed anywhere, they need to be practiced in a wide range of circumstances.

Go To Your Spot

A dog who is taught to go to his spot (or station) learns to go to a specific area and wait there until he is released. A typical spot is a dog bed, a mat, a crate or a designated space in the home (the mudroom or laundry room, for example).

Habituate

To become accustomed to a specific situation through repeated exposures. A dog may alert at a noise, for instance, but after hearing the noise repeatedly, he may become indifferent to it and begin to ignore it. This type of learning occurs naturally and doesn't require a structured training plan. (See also: sensitize.)

Learned Helplessness

When a dog learns that no matter what he does he cannot escape from an aversive situation and gives up trying. Learned helplessness is a negative, detrimental emotional state that has been associated with anxiety and depression.

Low Stress Handling

See fear-free or fearless vet visits.

Lure-based Training

Using something that a dog is willing to follow (most commonly food) to guide the dog into a desired position (a sit, for example). Once the dog is in the desired position, the lure is used as a reward. A lure can be a treat held in the hand, food on the end of a spoon, a toy or any other object that a dog will follow as it is moved.

Management

Controlling the environment so that the dog doesn't have an opportunity to rehearse an unwanted behavior. For example, a management strategy for a puppy who chews on furniture is to keep him in a gated, dog-proofed area away from furniture.

Mark

To use a specific signal at the moment a desired behavior occurs to indicate an acceptable behavior. (See also: marker.)

Marker

A stimulus that pinpoints the behavior the dog did to earn a reward. The most common markers are either a clicker or a specific word, such as "good" or "yes." The marker should be used at the exact moment the behavior occurs. For example, when teaching a sit, the marker should be used as soon as the dog's bottom touches the ground. The same marker should be consistently used by every member of the family or household and should always be immediately followed by a reward.

Motivated

When a dog's behavior is influenced by something he wants and is willing to work for. A dog who is motivated by games of fetch is both willing to play the game and willing to do what he's asked in order to get access to the game, such as sit before the ball is thrown.

Negative Reinforcement

Use of an aversive or undesirable consequence to teach a specific behavior. An example is the use of a shock collar to prevent jumping or barking.

Operant Conditioning

Increase or decrease in certain behaviors based on the associated consequences of the behavior. For instance, a dog may learn to be cautious of the cat after he gets swiped across the nose. Or the dog may learn that when he stalks the cat, a game of chase ensues. The quadrants of learning (positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, positive punishment, negative punishment) fall under the heading of operant conditioning.

Positive Reinforcement

Use of positive, desirable or pleasurable consequences to teach a behavior. An example is offering a dog a reward, such as a treat or toy for an acceptable behavior.

Punishment

Use of aversive stimuli to decrease or change a behavior. Punishment has a variety of negative consequences. Frequent use of punishment may lead the dog to fear his handler. Other unintended negative outcomes may be an escalation of the problem behavior or an increase in aggression.

Interrupt

To turn a dog 's focus away from an unwanted behavior as an intervention to stop the unwanted behavior. From there, the dog can be redirected to an acceptable behavior. An interruption does not need to be loud or sudden; a slight shuffle of the feet or a quiet clap is ideal.

Predatory Behavior

Behavior that mimics hunting, capturing and consuming prey. Most dogs exhibit only minimal predatory behavior, though certain breeds retain only pieces of the predation sequence. For example, herding breeds retain the " stalk and chase " portion of the predation sequence but may not bite or engage in any takedown behaviors, as this would deter them from doing their job of herding dogs without harming.

Predatory Drift

When a dog 's behavior shifts from acceptable play behavior to predatory behavior. This sometimes occurs during interactions between large and small dogs; the smaller dog squeals or runs away in fright, causing the larger dog to react to it as a prey dog. Predatory drift is one reason dog parks and doggy day cares typically maintain separate play areas for large and small dogs.

Premack Principle

A less predictable behavior is made more predictable by rewarding it with a behavior of higher desirability. For example, this could mean rewarding a dog for heeling (the less predictable behavior) by releasing him to investigate a smell (the more desirable behavior). The dog learns that in order to be released, he must heel first, which makes that a more predictable behavior.

Prompt

Using extra reminders, such as pointing, treats or bigger gestures, to elicit a desired behavior when the dog fails to respond to the initial cue.

Push - Drop - Stick

Shorthand way to know if a dog is ready for the next step in training. Put the dog through five trials of a desired behavior. If the dog can correctly do the behavior four or five times, push to the next level of difficulty. If he gets it right two or fewer times, drop to a previous, easier level. If he gets it right three out of five times, stick to that level.

Rate of Reinforcement

The frequency with which the dog is rewarded. The rate of reinforcement can be determined by counting how many rewards a dog is given in 60 seconds and dividing 60 by the number of rewards given. If the dog is given three treats in 60 seconds, the rate of reinforcement is one every 20 seconds. Dogs who are new to training should be kept at a higher rate of reinforcement (something close to 10 treats per minute) to keep them interested in the training.

Reactive

Acting out in order to ward off or escape a stimulus, for example, other dogs or people. Reactive dogs may be more tense and worked up when separated from the stimulus by a barrier or a fence. Reactive behavior includes lunging, barking, spinning, jumping, straining on hind legs and growling. Reactivity may also be associated with aggressive tendencies; a reactive dog may escalate from warning behavior to actual snaps or bites. (See also: barrier frustration.)

Redirect

To shift a dog 's focus from an unwanted behavior to a desirable behavior. If a dog is chewing on something forbidden (a shoe or book or sofa cushion), he can be redirected to a proper chew toy. He can then be rewarded for chewing an appropriate toy, which reinforces the acceptable behavior.

Reinforcement Reward(s)

A consequence the dog finds pleasurable and desirable. Reinforcement and rewards are learner dependent; some dogs will do what they are asked in return for a treat, while others may be motivated by a special toy or an extra session of play. Reinforcement and rewards are also contextual; what is reinforcing or rewarding in one situation may not be in another. For instance, a dog may find petting to be rewarding at home but may require a different reward at the dog park.

Resource Guarding

When a dog is protective of his valued possessions. Common objects for resource guarding include food bowls or food puzzles and valued toys, but a dog may also guard resting spaces, rooms, people or other items the dog finds that are of value to him, including seemingly valueless things like wrappers or Kleenex. Guarding behavior can progress from warnings of unease, like freezing or snarling, to more aggressive behaviors like snapping or biting.

Response Substitution or Differential Reinforcement of an Incompatible Behavior

Training that teaches a dog to replace an unacceptable behavior with one that is incompatible with that behavior. As an example, a dog who lunges on leash may be asked to make eye contact with a trainer, because eye contact is incompatible with lunging at another dog.

Scavenger Hunt - Treasure Hunt

Hiding treats, food or toys inside or outside for the dog to find. A scavenger hunt may be used as an alternative to a food puzzle. For example, kibble can be scattered on the grass rather than served in a bowl.

Sensitize

To become more sensitive, alert, fearful or reactive to a specific situation through repeated exposures. For example, a noise may initially cause a dog to startle, but after hearing the noise repeatedly, he may progress to shaking and stress panting when he hears it. (See also: habituate.)

Setting Events

Conditions in a dog ' s life that make it more likely that the dog will act in a certain manner. For example, a dog who doesn ' t get enough exercise may be more wound up and hyper around guests.

Shaping

The process of teaching a dog a complex behavior by breaking it down into simple steps. The simple behaviors are trained in a gradual progression, with each new step moving the dog closer to the goal behavior. (See also: successive approximation.)

Socialization

The process by which a puppy learns about the world. The prime socialization period of a puppy is from about 8 to 12 weeks of age but can extend from about 3 to 16 weeks of age. A puppy ' s experiences during this time can influence his perception and reaction to the variety of people and situations he will encounter as he grows.

Stimulus Control

When a cue elicits a predictable and reliable response from a dog. For example, when a dog is asked to sit, he does so every time under a variety of different conditions.

Stress

When discussing dogs, stress is frequently used as a synonym for distress. Dogs can experience stress for a number of reasons, from lack of enough exercise or mental stimulation to unpredictable and punishment-based interactions with humans. Stress can be related to environmental and life situations as well, such as moving, losing a family member or the arrival of a new pet. If a dog is exhibiting signs of stress, it is important to address them as early as possible.

Stress Signals

Behavior and body language indicative of escalating tension and anxiety, such as barking and whining or pacing and panting. Stress signals may begin with mild avoidance and progress to more extreme anxiety and panic.

Submission

Strategy for interacting with a person or another dog to create harmony and goodwill. Signs of submission can be subtle (a dog holding his ears slightly back in greeting) or overt (a dog rolling on his back in front of another dog). (See also: appeasement gestures.)

Systematic Desensitization

Training plan designed to change a dog's response to an upsetting scenario by breaking it into small pieces that do not trigger a fear response in the dog. The goal is to teach the dog to tolerate the situation without getting upset or anxious.

Target

Teaching a dog to touch a certain part of himself to an object or area. For example, touching his nose to a person's hand. Targeting can be used to get a dog to move willingly from one place to another. It can be used to teach a new behavior, such as a spin. Targeting can also help dogs to overcome fear of certain objects; a dog can be taught to target a pair of nail clippers as a way of reducing stress at the groomer's.

Threshold

A way of describing a dog's emotional state in a certain situation. A dog who is under threshold is tolerant and relaxed. A dog who is at threshold is mildly stressed, while a dog who is over threshold is anxious and reactive.

Variable Schedule of Reinforcement

A variance in the amount of time or number of behaviors required for a dog to a reward. A variable schedule keeps the dog excited about and invested in the training.

Warning Signals

Behaviors used by a dog to communicate discomfort with a situation. These can include freezing, growling, barking or snapping. These signals are used to warn a person or another dog to slow down and back off. It is important not to punish warning signals, because they are indicators of the dog's discomfort; instead, the situation needs to be addressed in order to prevent a bite or a fight.