



HEAD START RESOURCE MANUAL

HUMANE SOCIETY OF HURON VALLEY

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(Some materials used with permission from Karen Pryor Clicker Training)

Part One: The Two Ways Dogs Learn

(Used with permission from Dog*Tec)

1. Dogs learn by association (by emotional response).

Human example: We humans learn by association, too. When you meet someone for the first time you come away with an association—positive, negative, or neutral. If you really enjoyed the interaction, you are likely to be happy to see that person again. If you found the person difficult or argumentative, you might get that little pit of dread in your belly when you see him or her again—you have formed a negative association with that person.

Human–dog comparison: Dogs experience the world this way, too, perhaps more strongly than we humans because dogs lack the filter of rational thought. They are constantly forming emotional associations—safe, dangerous, neutral or good for me, bad for me, neutral. These associations inform the decisions dogs make and the reactions they have to various situations and things in their environment.

Dog example: A common example of associative learning in dogs is their reaction to the sight of a food bowl. Dogs love ceramics. Pull out the right bowl and the average dog will jump into fits of joy. This is because dogs have come to learn that this particular bowl *always* predicts mealtime. Food is tasty so we love food bowls. In other words, dogs associate bowls with eating.

The amazing thing is that we can manipulate dogs' associations to things. For example, new puppies generally find leashes inconsequential; when first shown a 6-foot length of nylon with a clip at the end they have a neutral association to it. But find a way to make a dog associate anything with something he loves and you can teach him to love that, too. How? Clip on the leash and give him treats or take him for a walk. Every time you leash him, either take him for a walk or give him treats until you take the leash back off. Pretty soon the puppy figures out that the leash means fun and, bingo. You have a dog that loves leashes.

The frightening thing is that learning by association also works in reverse. You can teach a dog to hate or fear leashes by repeatedly using them to give corrections or tie him up outside on his own.

What does this mean to us?

The implications are huge. Everything you do around your dog influences the associations he makes.

Here is an important example: Say I am walking my dog and I don't like the way he reacts to seeing another dog. Maybe he just barks in excitement, but I don't like it. I shout, "No!" and jerk his leash. This happens every time we see a dog. Pretty soon, my dog's reaction to other dogs is terrible—he barks and growls and lunges and snaps because I have built a negative association in him: Dogs equal pain. In other words, I have taught my dog to dislike or fear other dogs.

This is the main drawback of using punishment—it has unintended side effects. For example, it builds a negative association with the punisher, affecting the bond between person and dog. It is not that punishment doesn't work—it is that learning by association or emotion always comes along for the ride.

What might I do instead if my dog growls and lunges when he sees another dog? Reverse his negative association with other dogs. Treats are a good way to do this, but my dog might be too upset to take the treats. Put a spider right in front of an arachnophobe, and she will have a hard time listening to instructions to sit down and stop screaming. But keep the spider twenty feet away, only show it for short periods of time, and distract the phobic person with conversation or chocolate, and things will probably have a better outcome.

The process is the same for dogs who are scared of or upset by something. It is called *desensitization* and involves the 3 Ds: distance, duration, and distraction. We move the dog farther away from the upsetting object, try to keep the situation brief, and distract with cheerful voices and treats.

Remember, we are not rewarding the dog for his ugly display; he is too upset to control his behavior. We are trying to affect his emotional state so he feels no need to act that way and we can then ask for a different behavior.

2. Dogs learn by consequence (by doing).

Human example: I can tell a school-age child that I will take him out for ice cream when I see him next week to celebrate his good report card. When he eats the ice cream, he understands he is being rewarded for grades he got a week ago, and he got those grades for work he did over several months.

Human–dog comparison: A dog could never understand this—it is way beyond his ability to connect events. Dogs learn by consequence like we do, but for dogs the consequence has to be immediate.

Dog example: Say I lure a dog into a sit with my hand. Then I rummage around for the treat. By the time I deliver the treat five seconds later, the impact is lost because in those five seconds, the dog sneezed, sniffed the ground, and looked left. All of a sudden a treat appeared. As far as the dog is concerned, he got it for looking left. You will eventually teach that dog to sit, but it will take a while. Or you might end up with a dog that sits and looks left as a matter of course.

What does this mean to us?

That we need precision and immediacy to train dogs. Give your dog immediate feedback—let him know right away when he has done something you like. You can use praise, treats, or other dog rewards such as throwing a ball, opening a door, or letting your dog off leash to romp.

A dog's view of the world.

So, dogs learn in two ways—by association/emotion and by consequence/doing. And because of these two ways of learning, dogs see the world in two ways: What is safe/good for me vs. what is dangerous/bad *and* what works vs. what doesn't.

Safe vs. dangerous. This outlook on life comes from learning by association. When dogs gets punished for peeing on the carpet in front of you, they don't learn inside/outside—they learn that it is not safe to pee in front of you, but it is safe to pee when you are not there.

Works vs. doesn't work. This outlook on life comes from learning by consequence. All dogs try staring at the refrigerator as a strategy to get it to open. After a time they give up because it doesn't work; the fridge never opens. They also try staring at their people at the dinner table. Every once in a while someone gives in and shares a bite. Staring at people while they eat often works, so dogs continue to do it.

What does this mean to us?

Dogs don't do things we dislike to get back at us or be stubborn or naughty. This is a myth. To dogs the world is either safe or dangerous and things either work or they don't. Right or wrong never enters into it.

Dogs do what is safe and what works. That's all.

If a dog barks at you to throw the ball and you throw it, rest assured he will do that again. If you ignore the barking he will eventually give up and try something else. He is not trying to be obnoxious; he is just doing what works. If you ask a dog to sit and he doesn't, he is not being stubborn; you just haven't trained him well enough yet.

In other words, dogs are dogs, not people. Be patient with your dog and careful about what you pay attention to and what you ignore, and you will soon have a relaxed, content, and well-trained four-legged friend.

Part Two: Training Skills

Training is very much a mechanical skill. The better our mechanics, the clearer we will be to our dogs, and the faster they will learn. The following pages describe some exercises you can do to practice your timing and mechanics. Don't underestimate the benefit of doing this work. You may find it helpful to video tape yourself as well, and go back and review afterwards.

After reading through the exercises, you can see an example here:

https://youtu.be/f_rx2B0Ra14

And here is a video to help practice your own timing:

<https://youtu.be/LtQ6BAk3gPE>

Related blog post:

<https://www.clickertraining.com/how-to-practice-clicker-mechanics>

The Bean Counter

Activity 2.1

This activity will help you practice the essential skills of delivering treats swiftly and accurately, and keeping your treat hand still. The activity instructions use dried beans, but you can substitute small, dry kibble or something similar. The beans are about the same size as the treats you'll later be delivering to your dog.

You'll need

Cup or mug
Nearby table
Bag of dried beans
Treat bag
Timer

Setup

Place a handful of dried beans in your treat bag and put your treat bag around your waist.

Stand next to a table or counter with your cup or mug on it.

Choose a treat hand (the hand that you will use to deliver beans.) Then choose a neutral position for your treat hand.

Set your timer for one minute, put your treat hand at neutral position, and start the timer with your other hand.

Steps

1. Deliver a bean

Using only your treat hand, and starting with your empty hand at your side, take one bean from your treat bag, deliver the bean to the cup, and return your hand at your neutral position.

2. Repeat step 1

Repeat delivering beans until the timer goes off.

3. Count

Stop and count the number of beans in the cup to assess your bean delivery.

Do not count beans that land outside the cup; accuracy in delivering reinforcers is important and is one of the skills you're working on.

4. Practice with speed

Repeat this three more times and see how much you can increase your speed at delivering beans to the cup, while still maintaining the mechanical skill of returning your treat hand to neutral position.

Spill the Beans

Activity 2.2

While most of the time you will deliver the reward directly to the dog's mouth, there will be times when you'll toss the treat to "reset" the dog to give him the opportunity to offer the behavior again. This activity will help you practice the essential skills of delivering treats accurately from a distance, while moving, and with either hand.

You won't need a timer for this activity. You're working on accuracy, not speed, in this case. The activity instructions use dried beans, but you can substitute small, dry kibble or something similar.

You'll need

Bath towel
Bag of dried beans
Treat bag

Setup

Place a handful of dried beans in your treat bag and your treat bag around your waist.

Fold your bath towel in half, place it in the middle of the floor, and position yourself about 3 feet away.

Steps

1. Throw the beans

Using only your treat hand, and starting with your empty hand at your side, toss beans, one at a time, onto the folded towel. Return your hand to neutral position after every toss.

2. Increase distance

Move a foot farther away from the towel and toss the beans again. Repeat, adding distance to work up to 6 to 9 feet away.

3. Add motion

Move slowly around the towel as you toss the beans onto the towel. Work up to moving slowly around the towel at greater distances.

4. Switch hands

Repeat steps 1-3 with the opposite hand.

Click 'n Beans

Activity 2.3

You're now going to add the skill of clicking before delivering treats swiftly and accurately. This will hone your ability to keep your hands still and in neutral positions between each click/treat.

Make sure to keep your dog out of earshot while you practice with the clicker! The first time he hears the click, it should send a powerful message and you risk diluting its meaning if he listens to you clicking and sees no result.

The activity instructions use dried beans, but you can substitute small, dry kibble or something similar.

You'll need

- Clicker
- Cup or mug
- Nearby table
- Bag of dried beans
- Treat bag
- Timer

Setup

Place a handful of dried beans in your treat bag and put your treat bag around your waist.

Choose which hand will be your "clicker hand" and use the other hand to deliver beans.

Set your timer for one minute, put your treat hand at your neutral position, and start the timer with your other hand.

Steps

1. Click the clicker

Keeping your empty treat hand still, click the clicker.

2. Deliver the bean

Using only your treat hand, and starting with your empty treat hand at your neutral position, take one bean from your treat bag, deliver the bean to the cup, and return your hand to your neutral position.

3. Repeat steps 1 and 2

Repeat clicking and delivering beans until the timer goes off.

4. Count

Stop and count the number of beans in the cup to assess your bean delivery. Remember not to count beans that land outside the cup.

5. Practice with speed

Repeat this three more times and see how much you can increase your speed at delivering beans to the cup.

6. Practice with opposite hands

Optionally, if you'd like to see if it's easier to click and deliver beans using opposite hands, give that a try.

Part Three: Training Exercises

In the following pages are a number of foundation training exercises that you can choose to do with the dogs. Video example links are below – more complete text descriptions follow.

Clicking With Your Dog

Introducing a reward marker, which will be used in teaching new behaviors. For dogs that are nervous of the sound of the clicker, you can use the word “yes” as a reward marker instead.

Video Example with Clicker: <https://youtu.be/eJitQMdE5s8>

Video Example with Verbal Marker: <https://youtu.be/pjIS6dIoAkI>

Teaching a Hand Target

Hand targets are a great tool for encouraging a dog to move, change direction, or change position, and can be built into training many more skills down the road, such as loose leash walking, polite greetings, and coming when called.

Video Example: <https://youtu.be/TgCQNBetH8Q>

Name Game

Video Example: <https://youtu.be/GXoLdLNngG0>

Go To A Mat

Video Example: <https://youtu.be/UpTeil6XsWY>

Video Example: <https://youtu.be/RoNKhdoYwlc>

Shape Something New

Video Example – Shaping to “play” a toy piano:

<https://youtu.be/wLxfZevoBfA>

Six Steps of Clicker Training

STEP 1: ESTABLISH THE MEANING OF THE CLICKER

If your dog already knows that “click” means “food is coming,” skip to Step 2.

At first, the clicker means nothing to an animal. We want your dog to know that when he/she hears the click, a nice treat immediately follows. Start by clicking once and feeding the dog a treat as quickly as possible. This should get your dog’s attention. It won’t take long—fewer than a dozen click/treats should do it for most dogs. Click/treat for any desired behavior (the dog just looking at you, for instance).

To test whether the clicker has meaning to your dog, simply click when your dog is turned in the opposite direction. If his head snaps in your direction, he/she knows what it means!

It is best to begin with the clicker out of your dog’s sight. Avoid pointing the clicker at your dog like a television remote. If your dog is fearful of the sound, muffle the clicker by putting it in your pocket. You can also switch to a softer-sounding clicker or even the click of a ballpoint pen.

STEP 2: OBSERVE THE BEHAVIOR

Now use your clicker and treats (and your eagle eye!) to catch your dog doing something you like. Some easy possibilities include: looking at you, sitting, lying down, coming toward you, touching your open palm with his nose.

STEP 3: MARK THE BEHAVIOR

The timing of the click is crucial. Click as the behavior you want is occurring, not afterwards. So, if you’re clicking your dog for sitting, you would click just as his butt begins to hit the ground. The clicker becomes a new way of communicating with your dog, and must be consistent and mean the same thing every time: a treat is coming.

STEP 4: REINFORCE THE BEHAVIOR

Once you have marked the behavior with a click, deliver a treat to the dog. The treat should always come immediately after the click. The reinforcer (treat) must be rewarding to the dog! If he isn’t enjoying a particular treat, try another.

STEP 5: INTRODUCE A CUE

Once the dog is performing a behavior reliably (about 80% of the time), begin introducing the verbal cue just before the dog performs the behavior. Use any word or visual signal you want, but be sure the word (or short phrase) will only be given for that behavior. After the dog is performing the behavior in response to the cue, you may phase out the clicker and begin to alternate click/treats with things like toys, the chance to go for a walk, and petting/praise for correct performance. If you ask the dog to perform the behavior, always “pay” him in some way—whether it be the chance to go outside, fetch a ball, praise, play with a toy, greet a new person, or eat a small piece of food.

STEP 6: GENERALIZE THE CUE

To help the dog understand the cue in any context, reward successful responses in different environments (such as a new room of the house, outside in the yard, at a friend’s house, on the sidewalk, etc.). For very important behaviors (like a recall or potty training) continue to reward each and every response with a click/treat for a very long time to develop a stronger response.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND:

1. Proceed at the dog’s pace. Each dog learns at a different rate.
2. If you click, even if by accident, *always* give the dog a treat.
3. Always set the dog up to succeed by reinforcing the dog frequently (10-15 times per minute for simple behaviors like “sit” and “lie down”) and keeping training sessions very short (3 to 5 minutes is plenty for most dogs).
4. Keep a clicker handy. Buy several and leave them around the house, in your purse, and in your car. The clicker is a tool for training new behaviors. Once a behavior is trained to your satisfaction, the clicker is no longer needed for that particular behavior. You can just reward with a treat, petting, toy, praise, a chance to go outside, etc.
5. Have treats readily available. Get a pouch that goes around your waist or one that you can hook on a belt loop. Use treats that you can put in your pocket. Have treats available in strategic locations throughout the house, in case you catch your dog doing something wonderful!

6. If you plan to do a lot of training, reduce the dog's regular meal according to the amount of treats he is getting during training sessions. This will help keep him from gaining weight.
7. Treats are rewards (paychecks) for doing a behavior correctly. They are not bribes. Avoid dangling the food in front of the dog either before the behavior or before the click.
8. As a rule, treats should be small (about the size of a pea), tasty, and easily chewed and swallowed.

Clicking with Your Dog

Activity 3.1

This exercise will help you teach your dog that it's worth paying attention to the clicker, because it provides valuable information. You'll pair the clicker with treats to help your dog understand that a click means a reward is on the way.

You'll need

Quiet, distraction-free environment

Clicker

Treat bag

High-value treats

Your dog

Setup

Take your dog to a quiet area of the house (such as the bathroom or a bedroom) where there aren't any toys or other things for your dog to focus on. The first few times your dog hears the clicker, you're not going to ask him to do anything special.

Keep your training session very short. One to three minutes is plenty.

Review your clicker mechanics skills. Before you begin, decide which hand will be your treat hand and which hand will be your click hand, and determine where you will hold your hands in between clicks and treats. When you are prepared, begin the exercise.

Steps

1. Click the clicker

Click once, and immediately feed your dog a treat. Repeat this three times: click/treat, click/treat, click/treat.

2. Wait for eye contact

Next, wait for your dog to look at you (he likely will, as he's curious about this intriguing new food game). When he does, click and treat. There! Your dog is already starting to make the connection that when he offers the behavior of eye contact,

you click and he gets a reward. You're already on your way to training your first behavior.

3. Click for eye contact

For the remainder of your training session, every time your dog looks at you, click and toss a treat to reset him. Be ready to deliver those treats quickly, and to click as soon as he looks back at you. Dogs catch on easily to this game!

4. End with something fun

End the training session by doing something else your dog enjoys, like playing fetch, tug, or giving him a belly rub.

Teaching a Hand Target

Activity 3.2

In this activity you will teach your dog to target the palm of your hand with his nose. Like “go to a mat,” hand targeting is another very versatile foundation behavior that will help you train other behaviors later on in the course. Most dogs quickly learn to love hand targeting, since it is easy to learn and easy to maintain a high rate of reinforcement.

You'll need

Clicker
Treats
Treat bag
Your dog

Setup

For this exercise, since you'll be using one of your hands as a target, you'll need to decide whether you'll click with your target hand or the same hand that delivers treats. So practice without the dog and see which is more comfortable for you. Remember your clicker mechanics: clicking and treating need to be two separate, distinct actions.

You may find that you need to do a few training sessions to complete all the steps in this activity. With each new session, do a quick warm-up of the early steps of this activity before moving to the more advanced steps. If, at any time, your dog's progress stops, go back to the last point where he was successful and build again from there.

Steps

1. Get ready

In this exercise, as with the mat one, your dog is likely to touch or sniff your hand almost immediately, so be sure your clicker and treats are ready so you can click that very first contact.

2. Present your hand, click

Begin by presenting your hand right in front of the dog's nose, just an inch or so away. The instant your dog touches or sniffs your hand, click and treat. Repeat this step several times, removing and then presenting your hand again after each repetition.

3. Present your hand to the side

When your dog is reliably touching your hand when presenting an inch or so in front of his nose, begin to present your hand to the left or right, still just an inch or so away from the nose. Repeat this step several times.

4. Move a little farther away

Present your hand a little farther away, just a few inches at first, so the dog must move to reach it.

5. Add upward and downward

Raise your criteria so that the dog must move his head up and down in order to touch your hand.

6. Add following your hand

Raise your criteria so that the dog must take a few steps in order to touch your hand.

7. Add distance

Raise your criteria so that the dog must follow your hand for a greater distance.

8. End with something fun

End the training session by doing something else your dog enjoys, like playing fetch, tug, or giving him a belly rub.

The Name Game

Activity 3.4

This activity will teach your dog that his name means something great is about to happen! It will help you get an enthusiastic, immediate eye contact when you call his name. His name actually becomes the cue for this behavior. We'll be talking more about cues in Lesson 4.

You'll need

Clicker
Treats
Treat bag
Distraction-free environment
Your dog

Setup

Gather your clicker, treat bag, some high-value treats, and choose a quiet, boring spot in the house. Again, a bathroom, bedroom, or office would be ideal. Review your clicker mechanics before you begin, and keep your training session short (one to three minutes).

Steps

1. Wait for eye contact

Wait for the dog to look at you. Since you've chosen a boring spot, and you're the only interesting thing in the room, it shouldn't be long before your dog glances your way! The instant your dog looks in your direction, click and toss a treat on the ground for him.

2. Be ready to click again

Be ready to click again as he may look up at you again when he finishes eating his treat. Repeat a few times.

3. Add his name

Once your dog is consistently eating his treats and then immediately looking at you, it's time to add his name, which will be the cue for the behavior. Toss another treat. Watch him as he eats it and, as soon as he's finished, be prepared to say his name as his head is turning toward you. Click the eye contact and toss another treat.

4. Practice using his name

Each time you say your dog's name and he looks at you, click and feed him a treat.

5. End with something fun

End the training session by doing something else your dog enjoys, like playing fetch, tug, or giving him a belly rub.

Go to a Mat

Activity 3.7

In this activity, you will teach your dog to go to a mat. This behavior is the foundation for lying on a mat, which we'll be teaching later in the course. This is an opportunity to practice shaping, since you'll be reinforcing steps along the way as you build toward a goal behavior.

You'll need

Clicker

Treats

Treat bag

Bath towel or mat

"Go to a Mat" training staircase

Your dog

Setup

Using the "Go to a Mat" sample training staircase as a guide, familiarize yourself with the steps you'll take to teach your dog to go to a mat. For this, as with any shaping exercise, keep your sessions short. Remember, you're not waiting for a finished behavior. Rather you are shaping it in small increments.

Be sure to click and treat your dog several times at each step, making sure to maintain a high rate of reinforcement as he progresses through the steps. Depending on your dog's stamina and experience level, you may only be able to do one step per training session, or you might make it all the way to the end behavior! The steps below follow the sample training staircase. You should adjust your steps as needed. If, at any time, your dog's progress stops, go back to the last point where he was successful and build again from there. In each of the steps, you'll toss your treats to reset your dog for another repetition. You can vary where you toss, too—sometimes to the side of the mat, sometimes behind the mat—to encourage your dog to move toward the mat from different directions. Pick up your mat between training sessions.

Steps

1. Get ready to click

Have your clicker and treats in hand before you place your mat down on the ground. Many dogs will be curious about the mat and sniff it. That's a great first clickable moment, and you want to be sure not to miss it. So, get ready to click immediately!

2. Click looking at the mat

Click your dog for looking or glancing at the mat. Repeat a few times.

3. Click movement toward the mat

Click as the dog takes a step toward the mat. Repeat a few times.

4. Click sniffing/nosing the mat

Click the dog for initial curiosity about the mat, such as sniffing it. Repeat a few times.

5. Click a paw touch

Once the dog is reliably interacting the mat, increase your criteria to require him to touch it with his paw.

6. Click two paws on

Increase your criteria again so that the dog is touching it with two paws (this may happen very quickly!)

7. Click all four paws on

Once he's stepping on it with two paws reliably, increase your criteria again until he steps on with all four paws.

8. Pause before clicking

To help him understand the concept of remaining on the mat for a moment, pause for a second or two before click/treating.

9. Next steps.

Continue to practice. There are tons of uses for this behavior!

Shape Something New

Activity 3.8

In this activity you'll choose a new behavior to teach your dog using shaping. Just as you used shaping to teach your dog to go to a mat by breaking it down into several small behaviors, you will break down your goal behavior into several increments.

Choose a behavior that you think both you and your dog will enjoy doing and one that you can visualize training by shaping. Some ideas: wave a paw, lie flat on your side, or go around an object, such as a chair.

You'll need

- Clicker
- Treats
- Treat bag
- Blank training staircase
- Your dog

Setup

Gather your clicker and treats, and choose a quiet, boring spot in the house. Choose a behavior you'd like to shape, break the behavior down into small, achievable steps, and fill out your shaping plan on the training staircase before you begin training. Remember to keep your shaping sessions short—two to three minutes is a general guide.

Be sure to click and treat your dog several times at each step, making sure to maintain a high rate of reinforcement as he progresses through the steps. You may only be able to do one step per training session, or you might make it all the way to the end behavior. If, at any time, your dog's progress stops, go back to the last point where he was successful and build again from there.

Steps

1. Begin shaping

Begin on the bottom "stair" of your training staircase. Be ready to click and treat your dog for offering any signs of that behavior. Slowly raise your criteria, clicking

and treating your dog until he is reliably offering the first step of your training staircase.

2. Climb the staircase

Continue to progress through the steps of your training staircase. Remember to maintain a high rate of reinforcement and practice each step until your dog is reliably offering behavior that meets your criteria for the step. If you are not making progress, you may also want to stop and reassess the shaping plan, and then try again later. If you progress very quickly, you may also want to stop early while your dog is doing exactly the right thing. Learning to make your own decisions is an important shaping skill.

3. Next steps

Once you've reached your goal behavior, you may decide later on that you'd like to put that behavior on cue. We'll talk about how to do that later in the course.

Part Four: Working with Reactivity

Reactivity is generally considered a “distance-increasing” behavior, meaning that the function is to get the thing that has triggered the barking, lunging, etc. to move further away. Most reactivity seems to be motivated by an underlying emotional response of fear, anxiety, ambivalence, frustration, conflict, uncertainty, or some combination of those. Our goal in modifying reactivity is to:

- 1) Train a new behavioral response to the presence of the trigger, and
- 2) Change the underlying negative emotional response to a more positive one.

We want to work with dogs when they are “under threshold,” meaning they have perceived the trigger, but have not yet started to react. We then can reinforce a different behavior (such as looking away), and as the dog makes progress, gradually increase their exposure to the trigger.

Engage/Disengage: Phase One

This is probably the key exercise that we work on with reactive dogs, so we are going to break it down into a few lessons and work on it in steps.

Right now, when the dog sees a “trigger,” they pretty automatically start to lunge, bark, growl, etc. We want to replace that reactive behavior with a new behavior of looking calmly at the trigger briefly, then looking back at you. With this game we are turning the trigger into a cue to orient back towards you, replacing the reactivity with something more appropriate, and in the process, creating a positive emotional association with the trigger, since orienting back towards you will result in a treat.

It is important that the dog is under threshold and not reacting when they look at the trigger, so we are going to be working on this skill with gradually more intense distractions.

For your first exercise, you are going to be working on “Phase One” of the Engage/Disengage behavior using some type of mild environmental change that your dog feels neutral about.

Step One: Sit with your dog on leash and focused on you several feet away from where the distraction will appear.

Step Two: Have a helper enter the room or create some other type of change in the environment (if you don't have someone in your to help, you can create some type of environment change by picking something up, tossing something, etc.).

Step Three: When your dog turns to look calmly at the new person/thing/etc, click or say “yes” (you are marking the behavior of looking at something new and not reacting).

Step Four: As your dog turns their head back towards you, feed. If your dog continues to stare at the distraction, call their name and get their attention before you feed, then move the dog further away from the distraction before the next repetition.

Have the distraction go out of sight, pause, and repeat again.

For this phase, you will be marking when they look at the distraction, and feeding as they turn back towards you after hearing the click or “yes.” We want the dog looking back at you within two seconds – if they are taking longer, call their name so they look back at you.

Your dog may start to see the new person and turn their head back towards you so fast you don’t have time to click. That’s great – click for that entire behavior sequence and reward. In the video below, Chance “beats” Lowell to the click a few times.

Work on Phase One with a neutral distraction (not something your dog gets excited about), and we will build on this over time.

Video: <https://youtu.be/chc4tZ14Mmg>

Engage/Disengage Phase 2

In Phase 1, we were marking the moment the dog looks calmly at the distraction, essentially reinforcing the behavior of looking at something and not reacting. Because we then offer the reward as the dog looks back at us, we start to build a behavior chain where the dog is probably anticipating turning back towards you now when they see the distraction. Maybe they have even “beat” you to the click a few times, as Chance does in the previous video. Now you are ready to proceed to Phase 2.

Use the same set-up you used in the last exercise, but now when your dog looks at the distraction, pause for a couple seconds before clicking. If your dog turns back towards you within those couple seconds, then click and reward. They are now offering the entire engage/disengage behavior when they see the distraction.

If after about five seconds, your dog is still staring at the distraction, get their attention, reward, then make the distraction a little less intense for the next repetition (move further away, have the distraction

be something less interesting, etc.).

Right now, the distraction still should be something that your dog feels neutral towards, and is unlikely to react towards. Our goal at this step is that your dog will start to see a distraction, and will then automatically orient towards you within a few seconds.

Find It

Sometimes the trigger may get too close, and the dog may not be able to easily disengage. At these times, we want to start to increase distance in order to keep the dog under threshold. A good way to do this is to teach the dog a “find it” cue. Simply say the words “find it” and toss some treats on the path in front of you, which should redirect their focus down and forward, keep them moving, and cause good things to happen in the presence of the trigger. This game usually works better than handing the dog treats, as it engages their natural seeking and tracking behavior, which can reduce stress, and encourages continued forward movement away from the trigger.

Video example: https://youtu.be/dyh_3XYp1lw

Emergency U-Turns

While we are working to reinforce new behaviors in the presence of triggers, we also need to recognize situations that our dogs just aren’t ready for, and be able to easily increase distance when necessary to prevent them from reacting. Too often our dogs may learn that our changing direction is a cue that something is coming and it might actually put them on high alert. We need to teach the behavior of turning around abruptly as a trained skill that they can do easily, and that they associate with a reward.

Step One: Have your dog on the side they usually walk. Have your treats in the hand or pocket closest to them.

Step Two: Start walking forward together.

Step Three: Give a verbal cue such as “Let’s Go!” in an upbeat voice.

Step Four: Start to turn your shoulders and body AWAY from the dog (if your dog is on your left, turn to the right).

Step Five: Pause, and wait for the dog to turn their head or body in your direction. Click or say “yes” then feed on the side the dog is on.

Step Six: Proceed forward in the new direction. You can throw in a few “find its” here to keep your dog moving along with you.

Tips: The goal is NOT to move the dog with the leash, but for them to change direction voluntarily when cued. Pause, and wait for them to make the choice to turn without using leash pressure, then mark and reward.

Practice this on walks when NOTHING is going on so it becomes an automatic behavior. You also don't want your dog to start to think that every time you turn around, there must be a trigger present, so make this just a goofy thing you do every now and then on a walk.

https://youtu.be/XDc6j6Z_9-E

How To Work With Triggers

We still want to use management as necessary and avoid situations as much as possible that your dog isn't ready for. If you do encounter a trigger out on a walk though, here is my "decision tree" for what skills I want to work on with my dog:

1. If the trigger is far enough away that my dog is noticing but not getting fixated or reacting, then I want to reinforce the engage/disengage behavior chain, rewarding heavily as my dog turns away and ignores the trigger.
2. If my dog is getting "stuck" and not able to disengage on their own, but is not escalating, then I will use "find it" to get their focus off of the trigger and the dog moving ahead again. I will continue the find it game until we are at a distance that is more comfortable for the dog again.
3. If my dog is escalating or starting to react, or if I know it is a situation that my dog isn't going to be successful in, then we do an emergency U-turn and increase distance. After the U-turn, I can use "find it" to keep them moving along.

The art of this is reading your dog and knowing what they are able to do in the current situation. Over time, your dog will be able to do Engage/Disengage at closer and closer distances, but remember to fall back on your other, easier skills when necessary to help them stay successful. Work wherever your dog is at that day.

Related blog post:

www.clickertraining.com/reducing-leash-reactivity-the-engage-disengage-game

Part Five: Working with Fear

Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning

Gradual desensitization is the process of changing an animal's emotional response to a trigger by exposing them to the trigger at a level that does not induce a fear reaction. Over time, as the animal grows more comfortable at that level, we gradually increase the level of exposure, progressing only as the animal is comfortable.

We often pair this process with counter-conditioning, where the presence of the trigger also predicts the delivery of something the dog likes. We often abbreviate these two protocols as DS/CC.

There are a few key rules for a successful DS/CC plan to work:

- 1) The trigger must be presented at a level that the dog can perceive it, but it does NOT cause a stress response. You will increase intensity over time, but proceed in small enough steps that the dog is never feeling afraid.
- 2) Once the dog perceives the trigger, he will receive something that she likes, such as a high-value food reward.
- 3) The reward being given should be something he LOVES, and the only time right now he will receive that particular type of treat will be during the DS/CC work. You can use other types of treats for routine training.
- 4) The trigger must ALWAYS be paired with the "good thing" right now.
- 5) The dog will not be exposed to the trigger during this process until he can do so without being afraid. For example, if we are working with a dog who is afraid of the leash, and the dog does need to be moved on leash out of necessity (for example, for a veterinary exam), a leash that is as dissimilar as possible from the "training" leash should be used.

NOTE: Obviously in a shelter environment, we can't always control all of these factors, and consequently DS/CC can be hard. We can still make progress though, even if training conditions aren't ideal.

During a DS/CC session, you will begin by presenting the trigger at a very low intensity, and then immediately following with a reward. Rewards should happen whenever the trigger is in sight, and end when the trigger is removed from sight between repetitions. You will proceed following this general rule:

-If the dog shows any sign of avoidance/fear at the current level, **back up** and make it easier or less intense.

-If the dog is noticing the trigger and appearing neutral, **stay** at that level.

-If the dog is showing signs of anticipation or relaxation when the trigger is presented, **move forward** another step.

An example of how you might break up a leash DS/CC plan would be:

- Present leash on ground a few feet away from dog. Reward. Move leash away.
- Present leash on ground gradually closer to dog. Reward, etc.
- Reach for leash.
- Touch leash.
- Lift leash one inch off ground.
- Gradually lift leash further off ground.
- While holding leash, begin to reach for collar (you may need to break this into increments as well).
- Touch collar.
- Gradually move leash towards collar.
- Clip leash briefly. Gradually increase time it is attached.
- Let dog drag leash.
- Move about kennel with dog on leash.

Watch the dog's body language as a guide for how to proceed. Do not rush!

A few last tips . . .

DS/CC relies on very clean mechanics. *The presentation of the trigger needs to come just before the reinforcement happens, and needs to be the first part of the process.* Be mindful that in between reps, your hands should not be in your treat pouch or reaching for it – only reach for the food AFTER you have presented the leash. Otherwise, reaching for the treats becomes the predictor of the food and the movement of the leash might seem irrelevant.

Also, be careful not to get into a predictable rhythm where you are presenting the leash every X seconds. Sometimes you might present it right away; other times it might be a minute or so in between. If we get into a predictable pattern, then again the elapsed time becomes the predictor of the reinforcement, not the leash.

Training Exercises for Dogs Showing Signs of Fear

Description of an exercise to increase confidence with new people:

Treat/Retreat: <https://www.diamondsintheruff.com/treat-retreat>

Handouts for these exercises are in the following pages:

Show Me What You Got

Reinforcing any engagement or behavior from a shy animal.

101 Things to Do With A Cup (Or Any Novel Object)

This game rewards the dog for exploring, investigating something new, and trying new behaviors, all of which are empowering and confidence building.

Video Example: <https://youtu.be/jO1bv IS1Ds>

Show Me What You've Got

Activity

This is an easy and fun “game” to play with any dog, but especially a dog who is new to clicker training. It can be used as an enrichment exercise for all dogs, either in their kennels or while on their walks, and can be played for just a few minutes or much longer.

For shy dogs and dogs that may have experienced aversive training methods in their past, it's a great way to help lower their stress and teach them that it's perfectly OK to “offer” behaviors by reinforcing them for doing so.

You'll need

- Clicker
- Treats
- Treat bag
- Dog

Setup

Approach the dog with a clicker and a good supply of yummy treats. For particularly stressed or timid dogs use higher value treats accordingly. Offer a treat to test if the dog is interested. If eaten enthusiastically, you are ready to begin. If not, find something that the dog likes more.

Steps

1. Get the dog moving

Start the game by simply giving clicks and treats at a fast rate, at least every two seconds, for 30 seconds. After every “click” place the treat in different locations close to the dog for him to find and eat. Sometimes toss the treat and sometimes place it on a spot on the floor, but a different spot every time.

At the start of this game you are not clicking for any particular behavior. Instead, you are simply letting the click announce that a treat is now available, but in a different

location each time. The point is to get the dog moving and thus offering behavior, *any* behavior.

2. Observe the dog

After 30 seconds, stop and freeze for a moment. Do nothing but observe the dog. If the dog makes any movement, even a slight one, click/treat that movement. Now continue for about 30 seconds with click/treats for any movements the dog offers.

Don't focus on any one movement yet, just click/treat for as many different movements as you can. Most often there will be movements associated with finding the previously placed or tossed treats.

3. Repeat steps 1 and 2

After 30 seconds or so, repeat Step 1 and then Step 2. The point is to have the dog start offering a buffet of behaviors: head turns, paw lifts, head down/up, tail movement, mouth open/close, tongue licks, forward/back weight shifts or steps, body turns. Any movements, big or small, count.

You can alternate between these two steps as many times as you wish, as time permits. There is no particular goal for this game—instead it's the “process” that's most important. It gives dogs a “puzzle” to solve. The mental stimulation will help reduce overall stress levels.

EXTRA CREDIT

After you've had at least a couple iterations of steps 1 and 2 you can begin to focus on one particular movement you've noticed the dog offers that is either:

- cute
- something you think you can shape into a desired behavior (an offered head turn can lead to a spin, for instance)
- something that the dog offers more than anything else and you want to see where you can go with it

You'll probably find that if you play this game repeatedly the dog will offer at least some different behaviors each and every time. Watching shy dogs slowly come out of their shells with this game is a great reinforcer for the trainer and a lot of fun to do as well.

101 Things to Do with a Cup

Activity 3.5

This activity will help your dog develop the foundation skill of offering behavior. By clicking and treating him for interacting with a cup, you'll build his confidence and teach him that creativity pays off. The nice thing about this game is that the dog is never "wrong." Since you are not trying to train a specific behavior, whatever he chooses to do with the cup is a clickable moment!

You'll need

Clicker
Plastic or paper cup
Treats
Treat bag
Your dog

Setup

Be sure you are ready to click the instant you place the cup down. This means making sure your treats and clicker are ready to go. You may need to click less than one second after you place the cup down.

Steps

1. Get ready

Get out your clicker and supply of treats, review your clicker mechanics, and be ready to click.

2. Set down a paper or plastic cup

Set down your cup and click the dog for doing something—anything—to do with the cup, including looking toward it, at it, or smelling it. He need not even touch the cup at this point, just seeing him notice the cup is enough to earn a click/treat.

3. Toss a treat to reset

Toss a treat away from the cup so the dog is reset for another try.

4. Click any cup-related behavior

Continue clicking and treating for any cup-related behaviors the dog offers. You may find that sometimes you are clicking for the same behavior repeatedly, and other times you are clicking different behaviors.

5. Play often to build confidence

Play this game as many times as you want, and see how many behaviors you can get your dog to offer. He's never "wrong!"

6. End with something fun

End the training session before your dog loses interest in the cup. Then pick up the cup and do something else your dog enjoys, like playing fetch or tug, or giving him a belly rub.

Part Six: Other Ideas

On the following pages are other training exercises that you may choose to work on with some of the dogs, depending on their needs.

- Take It/Drop It

- Go Say Hi

- Shake

- Loose Leash Walking

Take It and Drop It

One of the traditional cues frequently taught in a basic obedience class is the “leave it” cue, meaning the dog should not eat, chew on, roll in, etc. whatever we have told them to leave. There are a few problems with the “leave it” cue though. If this is our approach to handling distractions, then the implication is that everything in the world is up for grabs unless you specifically tell your dog to leave it alone. It also relies on you being hypervigilant and getting those two words out before your dog has decided to go for something. Dogs see, hear, and smell things better than us and have faster reflexes, so this obviously isn’t a great strategy.

Frankly, I don’t want to have to go through the world telling my dog to “leave it” every time we pass any potential distraction. I want my dog to be able to make good decisions on their own, without my constant nagging. So how do we get this default “leave it” behavior? By teaching the opposite. We teach them when it is OK to have something using a “take it” cue – otherwise the assumption should be that it isn’t available to them.

Step One: Classically condition the “take it” cue. Pick up a treat, say “take it,” and immediately feed the treat to your dog. Repeat five times. The dog is learning that these words mean something good is coming.

Video: <https://youtu.be/hEfc52B8LIQ>

Step Two: Start to add a pause. Pick up a treat in your closed hand, wait for a few seconds, and as long as your dog is doing something you like (sitting, making eye contact, laying down, or just generally not bothering your treat hand), then say “take it” and feed the dog. Repeat, gradually increasing the length of time that the dog has to wait before getting the treat. You can also start to lower your hand a bit closer to the dog. As long as he doesn’t bother the hand, you will tell him to “take it” and feed. At this stage, your hand remains CLOSED around the treat the entire time.

Video: <https://youtu.be/vk7kyDzSW1Y>

Step Three: When your dog is doing well at Step Two, repeat the process but now present the treat in the palm of your open hand. If your dog dives for it, just close your hand. Then make it a bit easier the next time. See if you can lower your hand to the floor or a nearby table with your dog still leaving the treat alone until you say “take it” and feed them.

Video: <https://youtu.be/4lLkvQWAnhK>

IMPORTANT TIPS:

-It doesn't matter what the dog is doing when he gets the treat, as long as it is a behavior you like.

-That said, do NOT cue the dog for a specific behavior such as sit, down, or watch. The important part of this exercise is your dog is learning to make good choices on their own, without us having to micro-manage. They will discover that certain behaviors get them to reinforcement faster than "pushy" behaviors, so will offer those "polite" behaviors more often on their own naturally.

-If your dog starts pestering your hand, don't say anything, just raise it up higher. Then make it easier next time. Ideally, we want the dog to be successful the entire time. Mistakes aren't a necessary part of learning, so don't set them up to fail by putting the hand too close, too soon. This just builds frustration, and your dog might lose motivation to work.

Drop It

Method for teaching a dog to drop an object.

Video from Domesticated Manners:

<https://youtu.be/ndTiVOCNY4M>

Go Say Hi

The goal of this behavior is for your dog to approach a person, say hi with a quick sniff, then disengage and return to you.

This exercise works well for dogs that have a history of frequently practicing high arousal greetings, as it is often the prolonged contact and attention that starts to get the dog over-aroused. When dogs are able to take brief breaks by moving away during the initial greetings, they can generally settle down faster and then be able to have a longer greeting (if desired) once the initial energy and excitement has died down.

Your dog should already know a hand target behavior before beginning this.

This is an exercise for dogs who are social with people. If you have a shy dog, work instead on pure counter conditioning where you will deliver treats as the helper approaches. Don't force a shy dog to interact if they aren't choosing to.

1. Stand with your dog on a 4-6 foot flat leash. Reward your dog for maintaining a sit as the helper approaches, and not rushing towards them uninvited.
2. Have your helper stand about 10 feet in front of your dog and present their hand as a target.
3. Walk towards your guest close enough that your dog can touch the guest's hand but not so close they can easily jump on the guest. Cue the dog to touch the helper's hand with your hand target cue.
4. Mark the moment your dog touches the helper's hand.
5. Call the dog back and deliver the treat when your dog comes back to you.
6. At first, have the helper remain still. Over time, have them act more and more like a natural guest.

Tip: If your dog does not come back to you the first few times, call your dog's name. In extreme cases, lure. Avoid pulling the dog back using the leash. If your dog does not disengage within a few seconds and/or begins jumping, plant your feet, hold the leash as close to your waist as possible and have the guest move away.

<https://youtu.be/ISK8npqJa74>

Shake Hands

Activity 5.2

The behavior of “shake hands” is essentially a paw-to-hand targeting behavior. There are multiple ways to get the initial behavior started. We’ll discuss three different options here. For any of these options, it will probably be easiest for the dog to begin in a sitting position. With his weight shifted onto his rear end, he will have more stability once he starts raising a paw off the ground.

Begin with any of the three options below, and then proceed to the “Add the cue” section once you’ve completed the initial steps.

You’ll need

Clicker
Treats
Treat bag
Dog

Steps

OPTION 1: FREE SHAPING PAW MOVEMENT

If you have solid shaping skills, the behavior can be taught with free shaping.

1. Click and treat any movement of either front paw.
2. Most dogs will have a preference for which paw they will raise. Concentrate on the paw that moves most often. Click and treat only movements with that paw. If the dog is not moving, take a step or two to get the dog active, and click the start of any movement of the same paw.
3. Once you have consistent paw movement, begin to click only when the dog raises the paw off the ground (just an inch or two at first).
4. If he is reliably lifting the paw one or two inches, increase your criteria so that you only click the lifts that are more than two inches high.
5. Once the dog is reliably lifting his paw at least a few inches, begin to place your upturned palm “in the way” of the paw as it’s on its way back down to the ground. If

you are fast enough, you should be able to capture accidental contact between the dog's paw and your hand. Click/treat!

6. Continue clicking and treating polite contact between paw and hand until the dog is able to gently place his paw in your upturned palm when you present it.
7. Once the dog is reliably offering "paw in hand," gradually move the hand farther away so he has to work a bit. Proceed to the "add the cue" section.

OPTION 2: PROMPT THE DOG TO PAW AT YOUR HAND

1. Place a small object or treat in your hand and wait for the dog to investigate it with his paw. He might sniff at it initially, but be ready to click the instant he tries pawing at it. After the click, treat from the *opposite* (empty) hand. Repeat with the object or treat just a few times.
2. Fade out the object or treat after three or four successful reps and click/treat for any contact—even accidental—between the paw and your hand.
3. Once the dog begins to understand that paw-to-hand contact is what's working, click only "polite" paw-to-hand taps. If the dog paws roughly, do not click/treat those touches. If you continue to reinforce vigorous pawing at your hand, it can become unpleasant (and painful!) fairly quickly.
4. Gradually move the hand farther away, and continue clicking polite paw-to-hand contact until the dog can reliably place his paw into your flat, upturned palm.
5. Proceed to the "Add the cue" section.

OPTION 3: GENTLY TOUCH THE DOG'S PAW WITH YOUR HAND

1. If you have determined that the dog is comfortable with you touching his feet, you can click/treat as you gently touch one of his front paws. Repeat several times, making sure to click *as* you touch the dog's paw.
2. Wait for a few seconds to see if the dog has made the connection that his paw touching your hand = click/treat. Try holding your hand very close to, but not touching his paw, to see if he will paw at your hand. If he does click/treat. If not, go back to initiating the touch yourself, click/treating every time.
3. Once the dog begins to understand that paw-to-hand contact is what's working, click only "polite" paw-to-hand taps. If the dog paws roughly, do not click/treat those touches. If you continue to reinforce vigorous pawing at your hand, it can become unpleasant (and painful!) fairly quickly.

4. Once the dog has figured out what he's being clicked for, and is reliably offering you his paw when you place your upturned palm near it, try moving your hand a little farther away from the paw so the dog has to reach for it a bit.
5. Repeat several times, until the dog can reliably place his paw in your upturned palm. Proceed to the "Add the cue" section.

ADD THE CUE

Perhaps the simplest cue for "shake hands" is the presentation of the palm itself. Since you are already doing this, you already have a visual cue of sorts! Now it's just a matter of adding a verbal cue (if desired) to accompany the presentation of your hand.

1. Warm up the dog by presenting your upturned palm and click/treating the dog a few times for placing his paw in it.
2. To add the verbal cue, begin saying the word "shake," "paw," or any word you choose just before you present your upturned palm to the dog. Click/treat the paw touch. Repeat several times.

NEXT STEPS

Begin to cup your palm gently around the paw and actually "shake hands" with the dog before each click/treat. (Visitors might naturally do this, so it's good to get the dog used to people gently cupping and moving his paw as part of the trick.)

Some visitors might grab toward the dog's arm bone instead of the paw, so it can be useful to desensitize the dog to having people grab for his paw in all kinds of different ways. By clicking and treating many variations of "shake hands," you are teaching the dog that we humans do funny things sometimes, but if you just roll with it, you'll still get your treat!

Loose-Leash Walking

A shelter dog who can walk politely on a leash has a huge advantage over one who is dragging potential adopters down the street! It would be great to be able to train every shelter dog to walk politely, but it is a challenging behavior to train in a shelter environment.

This article will offer loose-leash walking guidelines, specific training steps, and troubleshooting advice.

Goals

When training loose-leash walking, your goals should be the following:

1. **Maximize *the time the leash is loose***, whether you are walking or stationary. This can usually be accomplished with a higher rate of reinforcement (clicking and treating every two to three seconds, let's say). Working on this while you and the dog are stationary can help you be successful with the second goal.
2. **Maximize *the number of steps walked on a loose leash***. When starting out, especially with a dog who is a dedicated puller, think in terms of the number of steps taken successfully on a loose leash instead of distance walked or duration of the walk. Setting low, achievable criteria when starting out is critical for success. Once you build a solid foundation at a low criterion, you will begin to quickly make significant progress.

Setting up for Success

USE HIGH-VALUE REINFORCERS

Food: Food is almost always the first choice, but in a shelter environment its value is often decreased due to either the dog having too much food available or the increased stress level of the dog. When using a food reinforcer for this behavior, it will likely need to be of very high value to the dog. High-quality kibble or biscuits might not work on the most determined pullers. Instead, try things like meatballs, liverwurst, hot dogs, cooked chicken, or roast beef. Only very high-value food is likely to trump the environment in reinforcement value.

Environment: For some dogs, being outside and exploring (sniffing) the environment is more powerful than anything else as a reinforcer. Make use of this by providing the dog with an opportunity to sniff as a reinforcer for a couple of steps of loose-leash walking. Make a note of what and where the dog likes to sniff and use it wisely. Consider preparing the walking area, if possible, with interesting smells that you'll be able to use as reinforcers for loose-leash walking.

Other reinforcers: Other possible reinforcers include access to a toy, a game of tug, the opportunity to catch or chase a ball, or, if the dog really enjoys it, physical contact (such as petting or rubbing under the neck/ears). Though these reinforcers are more challenging and time consuming to deliver, they can be just as strong as any other reinforcer for certain dogs. Consider using them if the dog really enjoys them, especially in the initial stages of training with a strong puller.

USE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

Leash: We recommend a six-foot leash. A shorter leash doesn't allow most dogs sufficient space, as the leash will be tight more often due to lack of leash length. This lessens the opportunities to reinforce. A longer leash allows the dog to get too far away for you to reinforce him in a timely manner. We don't recommend retractable leashes when teaching loose-leash walking.

Treat pouch: Something in which to carry your food reinforcers will enable timely delivery of reinforcers. A treat pouch with a waist belt is usually the best option.

Harness/head collar: Walk the dog on a front-clip harness or an appropriately fitted head collar to which the dog has been well acclimated. If using a head collar, take all necessary positive reinforcement training steps to be sure the dog is completely comfortable wearing one before using it for loose-leash walking training. For safety's sake, some facilities require "double leashing" the dog (using a slip lead and a leash on a halter/harness), or double-buckling the head halter/harness with an appropriately fitted flat collar.

Kennel to outdoors: Avoid reinforcement for pulling

The space where a shelter dog is most likely the pull (and pull hard!) is from the door of his kennel to the door that leads to outside. We will call this area, or any area where the dog has a strong desire to get from Point A to Point B, the "transport zone." While in the transport zone, we are not so concerned about training, but instead just getting the dog

from the kennel door to the outside door as quickly as possible (without incident) while still on a loose leash.

The easiest way to do this is to place a handful of high-value food directly on the dog's nose the very instant he is outside the kennel door and keep it there as you quickly transport the dog through the door to the outside.

This transport will require some especially good stuff to overcome the distractions of the other dogs in their kennels and the excitement of getting to go outside, but it is well worth it. Without a loose-leash transport, the dog gets a huge reinforcer—going outside—for pulling from Point A to Point B! Once he's reinforced for pulling his way from the kennel to the outdoors, he can pretty easily generalize that behavior to, "I pull hard whenever I want to get to something especially rewarding." This is a big problem in many shelters and it's best to keep it from happening altogether, or you will be working against yourself when trying to train reliable loose-leash walking!

Practicing loose-leash walking

1. Begin with a series of rapid click/treats for about 15 to 30 seconds, and then step off quickly for one or two steps. Chances are you will still have the dog's attention for this very short distance!
2. Give a click/treat as you come to a halt. Repeat. If the dog pulls, stand still until the leash is loose.
3. Very gradually increase the number of steps required before a click/treat, perhaps adding an extra step every third time the dog has been successful with the previous number of steps. Only increase criteria if the dog is successful with keeping a loose leash.
4. Begin to change directions after every click/treat. It usually helps to keep the dog's attention focused on you since you are where the "good stuff" is coming from! A change in direction can also serve as a reinforcer: the opportunity to explore in another direction.
5. Vary the number of loose-leash steps required for a click/treat, so you aren't constantly making it harder and harder for the dog. If the dog is successful with 10 steps, the next time you might require only 8, and the time after that, 12 steps, and so on. "Ping-pong" back and forth between requiring fewer steps and more steps, so that you are gradually increasing the number of steps, but the dog is allowed plenty of success.

6. When you're ready to head back inside, remember to keep working on loose-leash walking all the way to the door.
7. Once you're inside, "transport" the dog back to his kennel with food on his nose or a tug toy if necessary.

Troubleshooting

If you have a few successful steps of loose-leash walking and your dog takes a sudden turn to go sniff the grass, your response should be as follows:

1. Give the dog some leash.
2. Wait!
3. When the dog stops, looks up, turns to you, or anything other than sniffing, click and offer a treat, even if you have to go to the dog to deliver it.

With any luck you'll have the dog's attention for at least a split-second and you can choose one of the following:

- Launch into a short session of rapid click/treats to get back on the track you were on before.
- Take one step and see what happens.
 - If the dog takes the step with you, click/treat that step and immediately let him go back to sniffing. He's actually getting two reinforcers here—the treat and the opportunity to keep sniffing.
 - If the dog doesn't take the step, let him go back to sniffing. Watch him carefully and be ready to click/treat the instant he tires of that particular smell and looks up at you.
- Click and treat after the first step and then attempt another step or two.

MANAGING DISTRACTIONS

There are several strategies from which to choose when something in the environment (such as another dog) becomes a distraction.

- Feed the dog treats in rapid succession and then turn to go in the opposite direction.
- Place yourself between the dog and the distraction and then lead in the opposite direction with a handful of food at the dog's nose.
- Increase speed as you pass the distraction.

- Use a game of tug or a toy (for dogs that love them) to distract the dog from the distraction.
- Distract the dog with higher value food that you bring along specifically for such circumstances!

Optional: Put sniffing on cue

If you'd like, you can begin introducing a verbal cue such as "go sniff." The dog won't know what the cue means at first, but, if you are consistent, it won't take long for him to make the association between the verbal cue and the act of sniffing. The advantage of attaching a cue is that it gives you an easy way to communicate to the dog that a big reinforcer, in this case sniffing, is available, just as your click announces that a food treat is available.

If sniffing works as a reinforcer, use it to gain more steps just like the "click/treat" at the end of a successful number of loose-leash steps. You'll likely find that alternating between "go sniff" and click/treats as reinforcement for a successful number of steps works best. Sometimes dogs want to sniff and sometimes they want to eat.

Final thoughts

With these methods, you can train even the most devoted pullers how to walk on a loose leash. With this training, as always, be consistent. A five-minute walk on a loose leash (even if you only make it 100 feet!) is far better for a dog's chances at adoption than a walk where he covers greater distance but is allowed to pull the entire time.

A short walk like this may not give the dog a lot of physical exercise, but he'll still have the stimulation of being outdoors and having new scents to explore, plus the mental exercise of learning something new and wonderful, which will be rewarding in itself.

It's not about the distance covered. It's about what the dog is learning while he's on leash. If you can ensure that he's learning, each and every time he's on leash, that pulling doesn't work and a loose leash does, you will be doing him a huge favor.

Appendix

Reward Markers

Food Reinforcers

Life Rewards

Behaviors to Shape for Fun

Shaping Ladder

Reward Markers

Overview

Training is most efficient and effective when we have a clear way of communicating to the animal the precise moment that they have done the behavior we like. Using reward markers allows us to provide this communication so that the animal can learn faster.

What It Is

A reward marker is something that the animal can perceive (such as a sound, sight, touch, etc.) that predicts that a reinforcer, such as a treat, is coming. When an animal understands this association, we can use it to “mark” the behavior we are trying to train, helping the training to go faster.

Types of Reward Markers

The most common types of reward markers are something that the animal can hear, such as a click of a clicker, a short word such as “yes,” a short whistle, etc. Whatever sound is being used should be short and distinct, able to be produced quickly, relatively unique (not something the animal hears a lot in non-training contexts), and not a sound that the animal finds aversive or scary.

For deaf animals, we can use a visual marker, such as a “thumbs up” signal.

For deaf and blind animals, we can use a gentle touch to a part of their body, such as their chin.

A Few Simple Rules

For the marker to have meaning, it must come right before the treat – not at the same time or afterwards.

The marker should happen at the time of the behavior you want to reward – think about taking a snapshot of what it is you are trying to reinforce.

A marker is a promise. If you have marked a behavior, even accidentally, you must follow up with a reward. Otherwise, the marker will not be as effective as a training tool in the future.

FAQs

Am I going to have to carry a clicker and click every time my dog sits forever?

No. Markers are used in the learning process to help the animal understand what is earning reinforcement. Once they understand the behavior and its cue, you don't need to continue to click.

What if I don't have a clicker on me? Can animals understand multiple markers?

Yes, in fact, we encourage you to teach a couple types of markers. A verbal marker such as “yes” can always be used if you don’t have a clicker handy. During a particular training session, however, pick one marker that you are using – no need to both click and say “yes” at the same time.

Is this different from praise?

Yes, your marker word is a distinct type of information. This is why we recommend “yes” as a verbal marker. We don’t often say this word to our dogs in normal praise, and it is short and easy to say. We often tell our dogs what a good girl or good boy they are (which is great!), but this is different from a marker word that reliably predicts another reinforce.

Can't I just use praise?

Animals vary in how much they are motivated by praise. Most animals will learn much faster and reliably when we use something they value even more, like food or toys. Pay attention to what your animal likes most, and use what gets you the best results. If a behavior gets stronger, it is working. Feel free to tell your pet how smart and wonderful they are, but most will also learn faster and work better for you if there is some extra incentive too!

[Learn more](#)

Karen Pryor Clicker Training: <http://www.clickertraining.com/>

Food Reinforcers

From the fridge

Diced hot dogs
Cut-up deli meats (e.g. ham, turkey)
Diced liverwurst
Meatballs
Bits of bacon
Leftover steak
Bites of burger
Cheese cubes
Diced chicken

Fruit and vegetables

Baby carrots
Diced apples
Mashed up banana
Blueberries
Vegetable peels

Pantry

Cheerios
Chunks of canned tuna
Goldfish crackers

Pet store

Freeze-dried liver
Wellness Pure Rewards
Diced Natural Balance food roll
Fruitables
Zukes
Charlee Bears
Old Mother Hubbard Bitz
High-quality, grain-free kibble

Long-lasting reinforcers

Kong toys filled with cream cheese, peanut butter, or yogurt and then frozen
Shinbones filled with cream cheese or peanut butter
Dollop of peanut butter on a spoon

Life Rewards

Activities

Get out of the crate
Go for a walk
Get out of the car
Chance to train
Go to the park
Go to the training center
Run along the beach
Chance to see sheep
Chance to greet "Grammy"
Go for a swim
Come up on the couch
"Go see Mommy"
"Go see Daddy"
Chance to play with another dog
Fetch floatable toys
Fetch a ball
Chance to sniff grass
Chance to do nose work
Rolling in dead carcass
Sound of a clicker
Cue for a favorite behavior
Doing agility

Tactile reinforcers

Belly rub
Butt scratching
Scratch under the chin
Permission to jump up in my lap
Opportunity to lick a person's face
Petting from a stranger

Toys

Tennis ball
Kong squeaky tennis ball
Soccer ball
Soft Frisbee
Aerobie
Plush squeaky toy
Vinyl squeaky toy
Fleece tug
Ring tug
Rope tug
Tug stick
Antlers
Nina Ottosson interactive toy
Toys that crinkle
Toys that squawk, oink, ribbit, or moo
Toys that glow in the dark

Creative reinforcers

Plastic soda or water bottle
Paper towel tube
Crumpled piece of paper
Cardboard box
Sticks
Playing with water from a hose

Behaviors Just for Fun

Beg

Take a bow

Circle me

Look puzzled

Crawl

Dig

Wave

Figure 8 (between legs)

High four

Kiss

Nod your head

Play dead

Yawn (Are you tired?)

Roll over

Shake head

Spin

Walk backwards

Where is your tail?

Where is your nose?

Where is your ear?

Shaping Plan Worksheet

Use this worksheet as a guide to shape a behavior. You may need fewer or more steps.

Animal	
Goal behavior	
Methods of getting behavior	
Tools and props	
Cue	

Shaping staircase

	Goal:
Start:	