



Dog Training & Behavior Services

Courtesy of: Heather Hime

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How Dogs Learn

Basically, dogs do what works. If jumping gets them attention, they will jump. If coming in from the yard earns them nothing more than having to come inside where it is boring, do you think they will continue to come when called? On the other end, if sitting gets them attention, they will sit. If coming when called gets them rewards, they will come when called. Humans actually work in a very similar way. The only way you would work without pay is if you really loved your job, and even when you love your job, there are days you don't feel like working. What type of boss would you prefer? One that punishes you constantly when you do something incorrectly when you were never actually taught what they want, or a boss that rewards you for doing your job well, politely tells you when you do something incorrectly and helps you figure out how to do it correctly?

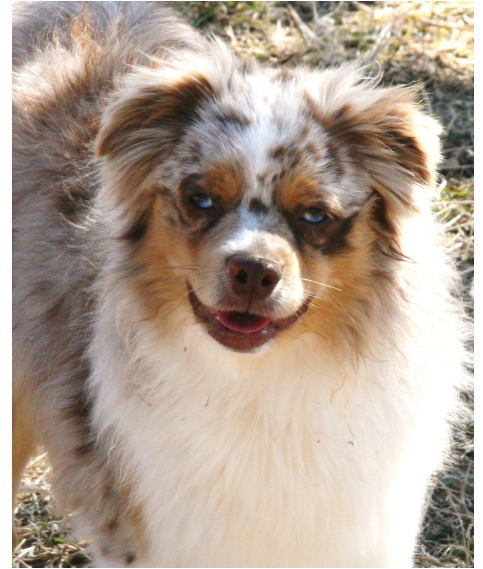
Below are the keys to success in training and communicating with your dog:

Consistency

It is important that you are consistent with your dog. If you allow your dog to jump up on you sometimes, but punish other times, your dog will begin to lose trust in you & simply not understand, however if you are consistent with your rules, the dog will understand what he needs to do on a daily basis in order to achieve rewards.

Fair leadership, rules and boundaries

It is important that you are fair with your rules and boundaries and take your dogs needs into account. You shouldn't expect your dog to be calm, if you aren't giving him regular outlets for his energy. It is also important to be a loving and fair leader that your dog can respect. Leadership does not mean being aggressive with your dog. We will cover leadership more in depth later in this presentation.



Good communication

- Be sure that you are using the same commands each time and making those commands distinct from one another. Don't have a conversation with your dog, just give them the words that they have an association with. Dogs don't require complete sentences. Be sure that you are also sending the correct signals with your body language. Example: Use the exact same word each time (come vs. come here can be confusing).

- The ability to train them what is "right," so that they know how to do things correctly, not just what not to do.

- You shouldn't only be punishing your dog for what they are doing "wrong," you should take every opportunity you have to positively reinforce good behavior, even if you didn't ask for it.

A well behaved dog is easy to ignore, but that's the perfect time to reward your dog.

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Understanding what your dog needs

It is very important that you understand what your dog needs. It is easy to forget that your dog needs a lot of exercise to be happy and healthy. Simply running around your back yard is often not enough, especially if you only have one dog! Walks, runs, off leash time and dog parks are all great outlets for exercise! You can even teach your dog to walk on a treadmill which is a mental and physical exercise.

Your dog also needs mental exercise! It is important to find ways for your dog to use its mind! How would you feel sitting around on the couch all day doing NOTHING for years and years? You would prefer to watch a movie or read a book right? Teaching your dog new things (obedience and tricks training), playing games with your dogs (find it, hide and seek, fetch) and giving them interactive toys (kongs, treat cubes, and puzzle toys) is very important.

Dogs that are bred for specific purposes also need the opportunity to express their instincts and drives. Denying a dog the ability to practice what is ingrained into their genes is cruel; however doing so in a safe and controlled manner is important.

Timing

Timing is very important when teaching a dog a new behavior. If you reward your dog even a few seconds after the good behavior, you are likely rewarding the wrong behavior and sending the wrong message. Your timing needs to be spot on!



What's in it for me?

This is not to say that dog's sometimes don't just choose to ignore you, or choose not to do what they are told. Generally the reason they choose not to listen is because they ask the question, "What's in it for me?" When your dog is out in the yard sniffing and chasing squirrels, why would they come in when you call? That is like your boss asking you to work Saturday, but oh yeah, you won't be paid for it! Expecting your dog to come running inside when he is in the middle of chasing a squirrel is crazy, unless you have something of equal or greater value and have spent time training him, that when you say "Come" really amazing things happen, like tons of treats and play and praise, or whatever your individual dog feels is most valuable.

Not all dogs are willing to "work" for just praise. Some dogs could care less about your praise, especially the more independent breeds. It takes some great leadership in order for your dog to value your praise and affection, and even then, they probably enjoy treats or a good game of tug a lot more!

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