

Dog training



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pdca responsible pet care

Dog training

What is it?

Training is a way of modifying your dog's behaviour so that they fit in with society and the required standards of conduct in public. It is important to train your dog using positive techniques, for example, by rewarding them with savoury treats or extra attention for 'good' behaviour.



The reward has to be more interesting than anything else that is going on, and it should be something that your dog really likes so that it clearly is the best thing on offer.

Using 'negative' training techniques such as rubbing a puppy's nose in any mess it may have produced will not help. A puppy will not understand what is 'wrong' in its owner's eyes as it has not got enough memory to connect the punishment with the behaviour.

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Why do it?

Inappropriate forms of behaviour that are most commonly seen in dogs include rough playing, aggression, jumping up, stealing, destructive chewing and excessive barking.

You can try to prevent these unacceptable behaviours through training, which helps form or reinforce the bond between you and your pet. An untrained dog can be a danger to itself, the owner and members of the public.



Hand signals



As a dog gets older it may develop hearing difficulties and so it will not be able to respond to verbal commands alone. Hand signals therefore become an invaluable aid in communicating with your dog.

When rewarding spoken commands, the savoury treat is held in one hand. Use the same hand to give consistent visual commands (as illustrated).

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House training



House training is one of the first lessons. You need to observe your dog very closely. At about three weeks of age a puppy starts leaving its mother to go to the toilet. At around 8 weeks it will start sniffing the ground for scent marks before it performs.

Find an area indoors that you can clean easily and put down plenty of newspaper. Put your puppy on the paper and when it goes to the toilet, praise it. As soon as your puppy is fully protected by vaccinations, you can let it go into the garden. Put newspaper outside and use the same technique. Gradually do away with the paper.

Another method involves close observation of your puppy for the sniffing signs that show it wants to go to the lavatory. When it does this, move it to the area you want it to use, and praise it when it performs. Usually

a combination of these two methods, using the paper only at night, works best. If an accident does happen, the area should be thoroughly cleaned as soon as possible. Use a warm solution of a biological washing powder, rinse with cold water and then allow the area to dry. The aim is to remove the smells completely, not just to mask them.

Other training techniques

The most common skills that dogs can be trained to perform include walking to heel, sitting, lying down, staying, coming, leaving and dropping. The important period of learning is from approximately 3 weeks to 14 weeks of age and during this time they respond well to training. As puppies have very short attention spans, it is best to train them for short periods on a regular basis. Remember to work in stages and always make sure that the location is as safe as possible, preferably an enclosed space, when your dog is off the lead.

A sharp 'no', or distracting your pet with a 'noisy tin' filled with pebbles, a game or a toy should draw the culprit away from any unacceptable behaviour.

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Walking to heel



Dogs tend to be unreceptive to 'walking to heel' as they are very inquisitive but it is vital for everyone's safety that you train them to walk like this. Start with short sessions and gradually build up the time until they can be taken for a controlled walk. Make sure your dog is fully vaccinated before you start taking it outdoors.

Start by attaching your dog's lead to the collar, holding the lead in your more dominant hand with the dog on your opposite side, making sure your dog is furthest from the road. Walk in

a straight line and say 'heel', speaking calmly at all times to reassure your dog. It is important that there are no distractions so your dog gives full attention to you and your commands. If your dog starts to walk in front of you, pull gently on the lead and overtake it. Once your knees are past your dog's head, give a savoury treat or praise.

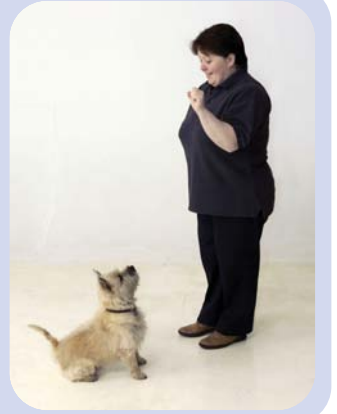
If this is done every time, your dog will soon learn what is expected. If your dog continues to walk in front of you and pulls on the lead, step to one side and turn your dog sideways. You may need to turn a complete circle to get your dog to stay at the 'heel' position.



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Sitting

Begin this once you have both mastered walking to heel. Stand facing your dog, hold a savoury treat in one hand and move it over your dog's head. This will make your dog look up. As you move the treat backwards your dog will sit. Once the hindquarters are on the ground say 'sit', give the treat and praise. Always follow the desired behaviour with a reward and your dog will soon learn to obey your command. It will not work if you push down your dog's hindquarters.



Lying down

This comes after your dog can sit to order. Once in the sitting position move your hand, holding a savoury treat or a favourite toy, down onto the floor just in front of your dog's forelegs. Your dog will naturally lower itself into a lying position to reach the treat. Say 'down' when in the correct position, and give your dog the reward, praising lavishly.

'Stay'

Take a step away from the sitting or lying dog, and say 'stay' while lifting your hand with your palm facing the dog. Step forward and reward your dog. Gradually take more steps backwards increasing the distance between you and your dog, each time saying 'stay' and lifting your hand. Make sure you reward your dog each time it obeys you.



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'Come'

Once your dog can 'stay', you need to make sure you can command it to return to you. From a distance, call your dog's name and say 'come' while pointing to the ground by your feet. When your dog is back with you, reward it. Repeat this from varying distances and your dog will soon learn to return to you in the hope of receiving a reward.



'Leave'

This command is useful if your dog comes into contact with dangerous or unsuitable items such as a poisonous chemical or your favourite shoes. Teach this command by placing a savoury treat on the floor and saying 'leave'. If your dog tries to eat it, say 'leave' and distract your dog by rattling the 'noisy tin' containing pebbles. Once your dog has left the treat untouched, give a reward.



'Drop'

This is useful to get back a toy for re-throwing, or to make sure your dog can be told to drop anything dangerous in its mouth. Wait for your dog to drop the item and then say 'drop' and give a reward.

Alternatively, try rattling the 'noisy tin' so your dog is distracted and lets the toy fall, again saying 'drop' as this happens. Over time, your dog will come to drop the toy in the hope of receiving a reward or more play.



PDSA vets advise:

“A responsible pet owner will always make sure that their dog is well trained, making it a pleasure to be with.”

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