

# BEHAVIOR Training

Kentucky Humane Society

## “POSITIVELY” BETTER TRAINING

Many trainers used to believe that the best way to train a dog was to tell him over and over, and often harshly, all the things he was doing wrong. If the dog pulled on the leash, a sharp painful jerk was the way to correct this. If the dog jumped on a person, his back paws were stepped on. The belief was that if you showed a dog all the bad things that could happen as a result of an undesirable behavior, that behavior would disappear. Not only did this create unimaginable stress and anxiety for the dog, most loving owners found these training techniques stressful too.

Luckily we have a much better way to train using something called positive reinforcement techniques. Instead of correcting the wrong behavior, now we reward and reinforce the right/desired behaviors. Think how frustrating it can be to be told everything you are doing is wrong (everybody has had a boss like this in their life), yet you are never told ‘good job’. How would you ever know what behaviors to repeat? Instead, if you were told you that you did a great job on project X, you could repeat that same process over and over. This is the principle of positive reinforcement training: Let the dog know what you want to see by reinforcing those behaviors.

The most compelling reason to use positive reinforcement training is that it is *HUMANE*. Positive Reinforcement Training (PRT) focuses on telling the dog when they are doing something right and shaping (not forcing) correct behaviors. For example, to teach Sit an owner doesn’t force the dog’s hind to the ground, but rather prompts a sit with a treat, or just waits for the behavior to happen, and then marks the behavior with a reward. (Forcing the dog into a sit never teaches them how to do the behavior on their own.) Pretty soon, a sit means a reward and thus a frequent, positive behavior is formed. Because the behavior has always been associated with good things, the behavior will often appear on its own with little, if any, prompting from the owner. The only thing the owner has to know for PRT to work is what behavior they want. When they see that desired behavior, they reward it!

The second most compelling reason to use PRT is that punishment based training can cause very serious, unintended consequences. How can this happen? When a dog sees another dog in the park, he pulls on his leash because he wants to play with the dog. The pulling dog gets choked, pinched and/or corrected for the pulling. Every time he sees another dog he gets choked; therefore, dogs equal pain. A dog-aggressive dog has just been shaped by his owners. In addition to potential severe side effects like aggression, punishment can ruin the relationship between dog and human.

Another reason PRT is more effective than punishment based systems is that it creates an environment where dogs want to learn. PRT focuses on building a mutually respectful relationship between you and your dog. Your dog wants to do the right thing to earn his rewards. In punishment systems, dogs would often shut down from training. I can only imagine after the first ten corrections what a dog must have been thinking “I can’t do anything right so I just won’t do anything at all!”

PRT is in no way bribery, it’s simply your dog’s payday for a job well done! By training with simple positive reinforcement techniques, you can have a well-trained dog who looks forward to pleasing you with all the great behaviors he has learned that are sure to earn him rewards! It’s a WIN-WIN for you and your dog!