

TRAINING TIPS

How puppies learn

As with all animals, puppies are likely to repeat behaviours that they are rewarded for and not to repeat behaviours which don't achieve a good outcome for them. They are learning all the time, not just when their owners are deliberately trying to train them! Their behaviour can be rewarded by food treats or a chance to play, but the attention of their owners can be a great reward too. It is common for owners to accidentally reward behaviours they don't want their puppy to do by inadvertently giving them attention. (See **PUPPY JUMPING UP, PUPPY MOUTHING AND BITING**, and **PUPPY 'STEALING'**). A less obvious way in which a behaviour can be rewarded is if it results in relief from the experience of an unpleasant emotion such as fear or frustration.

Punishment and why you shouldn't use it

Modern academically-qualified dog trainers and animal behaviour counsellors who have studied the latest scientific research recommend that punishment should never be used when training dogs. There are several reasons for this:

- When puppies behave in ways that humans find inappropriate, they are not doing so to be 'naughty', they are simply behaving as they are motivated to.
- Puppies are generally unable to associate what they have just done with punishments that their owners inflict on them afterwards – this can make their owners seem unpredictable and scary.
- Punishment can damage the bond between puppies and their owners.
- Punishment can adversely affect the welfare of puppies by causing fear and anxiety.
- Several studies have shown that dogs who have been exposed to punishing training methods are more likely to show aggression to their owners than those who are trained by reward-based methods.
- Puppies are generally eager to please, and rewarding behaviour they do 'right' and ignoring anything they do 'wrong' (while guiding them into more appropriate behaviour) is an effective way of training.

Clickers and marker words

Puppies move and react to things quickly especially when they're excited. When you're training, the timing of rewards is important. If you're too slow, your puppy may be doing something else by the time your reward appears, so that you reward the wrong thing. Using a 'marker' word or a clicker can make this a lot easier. As the name suggests, a marker word is a short word such as "Yes" or "Good" that you say to mark the exact moment that you puppy does the thing you want them to. A clicker can be used in the same way, as long as your puppy is not scared by the click noise. For most puppies, it is fine to use both a word and a clicker at different times, because you're unlikely to have a clicker to hand in all situations that you want to mark your puppy's appropriate behaviour.

To start with you need to teach your puppy that the marker word or clicker sound mean that they are going to get a treat soon. To do this you say the word or click, then produce a treat – and do this several times until your puppy is looking expectant every time he hears the sound. After this, every time you 'mark' a behaviour, it will show your puppy what he is being rewarded for, and you don't have to produce your treat at exactly the right time.