

Puppy Training Basics

Teach your puppy the training basics.

September B. Morn

Your puppy is napping while you take stock of its morning escapades. Hmm, laces chewed on your shoes, slacks decorated with paw prints, bandages on fingers from playful nips and a note from your neighbor that starts, About the barking... Your pup is the picture of innocence, little paws making twitchy movements in its sleep. You wish for a way to somehow skip the challenges of puppyhood and go straight to a mature, responsible dog. That's impossible, of course, but there are skills you can teach now to immediately improve your pups manners. Different Methods Lure-and-reward training works by showing the dog a treat, then moving it so the pup follows into the desired position. The pup is then rewarded with the treat. This is good for jumpstarting new skills, but it can backfire if you use the lure too long. When that happens, pups refuse to do the trick unless they see the money first. Avoid this by phasing out the lure as soon as your pup readily follows it.

Instead of holding the treat in your hand, keep it in a pocket or the other hand. Make the same hand motion, but without the treat. The first time you do this, your pup will assume theres a treat in your hand and will follow as if there were. Immediately praise and give it a treat you had kept hidden. From that point forward, don't lure, just use the hand motion as a cue for the trick.

Molding (modeling) involves physically placing the pup in the desired position, then rewarding. Simple tricks, such as shake, can be taught this way, but it can backfire a couple of ways. Some pups are frightened by being physically manipulated. Other pups come to rely on physical manipulation as part of the cue.

Clicker training uses a special sound and an immediate reward to let the pup know it has done something right. This makes it easy for the pup to learn without physical manipulation or lures, although those techniques, done skillfully, can be used along with clicker training. Clicker trainings drawback is it takes time and practice for people to learn. Clicker training is about keen observation, clear communication, splitting skills into easily learnable parts and immediately rewarding desired behavior. Clicker training uses a marker signal to let the dog know it has done something right. The most common marker is the click sound of a plastic training clicker, but any brief signal can work a word, a tongue cluck, even a penlight flash.

The click means three things: That's right! Here comes your reward! Stop for a moment and collect your pay!

Condition the dog to the marker by pairing the sound with rewards many times. Food treats are the most common rewards used in training new skills, but anything can be used as a reward, including toys and praise. Next Step: Basic Manners