

Kelly Krager

From: Aidan, Positive Petzine [editor@positivepetzine.com]
Sent: Tuesday, August 28, 2007 9:32 AM
To: Kelly Krager
Subject: [positivepetzine] Why use food to train Sophie?

Hi Kelly and Sophie, if you go to any good dog trainer or read any of the many excellent books on dog training these days you will discover that most trainers are using food in their training. Why is this so?

Many dog owners are discovering the joy of humane, pet-friendly training using **Positive Reinforcement**. Positive Reinforcement involves giving the dog something they want when they do something *we* want. It's the same as getting paid to work, we turn up and do our job, and our employer pays us accordingly (well, enough to keep us doing our job anyway!) Would we go to work without pay? Not likely! Even volunteers get something out of doing their job.

The question is, what do dogs want? The list is almost endless, there are the basic requirements such as food and water. Then there are things like social contact, attention, play, toys and exercise. All of these things can potentially be used as positive reinforcement, and each dog will have a particular bias for what he or she will or will not work for.

So why do positive reinforcement trainers rely mostly on food in their training?

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1. All dogs need to eat. Food is necessary to survival and dogs are hard-wired to work for food.

2. Most dogs love to eat, even beyond basic survival.
3. Some food is particularly tasty to dogs and will get a more enthusiastic response.
4. Food is convenient for the trainer, lots of small pieces fit in a bag or pocket and can be used throughout the day whenever we catch our dog doing something we like!
5. We have to feed our dogs anyway, so we might as well get something in return!
6. It is quicker and more efficient than training with play or toys, therefore we can get in many more reinforcements in a shorter space of time
7. Food gives the dog positive associations with being trained.

Why don't some dogs work for food? Mostly this is because they are not hungry. They either have free access to food, have too large meals, or very small stomachs and fill up very quickly. They may simply not like the food you are trying to give them, we all have different tastes when it comes to food.

Other dogs might be anxious or stressed. A sudden loss of appetite in a healthy dog can be a sign of anxiety, particularly if they are in a new or stressful situation.

Whilst special treats are great to use for training, often they are fatty, sugary or salty and not particularly healthy, so use these in moderation. The healthier the food you use, the better your dog's health will be. Some trainers are lucky enough to have dogs that enjoy healthy treats like carrot or apple!

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Here's a trick for owners with dogs that don't appear to be food motivated:

- Divide your dogs normal meal into small pieces suitable for training
- Use those small pieces as training treats
- When you have finished training, give your dog the remainder as his meal

If that doesn't work, please seek help from a competent positive reinforcement trainer or veterinarian if you suspect health problems. All dogs need to eat, and all dogs will work for food - no exceptions!

Regards,
Aidan
Editor

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