

CLICKER TRAINING

A POSITIVE WAY TO TRAIN YOUR DOG USING PROVEN SCIENTIFIC TECHNIQUES

BY:

Laurie Zurborg
Top Dog, Lead Trainer
Wags & Wiggles Dog Daycare
& Training Facility

949 635-9655
www.wagsandwiggles.com

WHAT IS CLICKER TRAINING?

Clicker training is a training technique that allows you to train positively with your dog. The clicker is a marker that tells the dog exactly WHAT behavior you are looking for. We can set up the dog for success by way of management (more on that later!), mark the successes with the clicker, and then apply reinforcement to ensure the correct behavior will continue.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE CLICK

Clicker training is based on learning theories described by BF Skinner's theory of Operant Conditioning. This theory states that any behavior that is reinforced will repeat again and again. This can work for you and against you. Many dog owners complain that their dog jumps on them and other people. Usually it is discovered that the dog has been reinforced heavily for this behavior. All those times you came home from work, Fido goes crazy, and you pet him. You are depositing lots of reinforcement into a behavior you don't really like! Now we can change that using a clicker, a handful of rewards, and a new alternate behavior like sit to greet.

Karen Pryor brought clicker training to a forefront in the dog training world. She found that while working with dolphins, you can't force them to do anything! They discovered that using a whistle as a marker and a great reinforcement like fish, dolphins could be taught everything. Dogs learned just as fast using a clicker and treats.

CORRECTIONS/PUNISHMENT

Why would you want to punish your dog while they are learning something new? Especially when so many of their faults have been unknowingly caused by us. Would you punish a child for stumbling during their first tentative steps? Of course not. I want all my dogs to be willing participants in the training process and not be afraid to offer new behaviors. Coercion (popping the choke chain, alpha rolls, scruff shaking, yelling, shock collars) has its fallout and we don't have to force compliance.

MANAGEMENT

Training positively doesn't mean letting your dog do whatever he pleases. Management is a key part to our training plan. Prevent bad behaviors before they happen, use a pain-free gentle leader to control your dog, give your dog the outlets he needs and apply reinforcement to the behaviors you do like.

MYTHS

No, you will not need to carry a clicker and treats forever. The clicker is used to speed up the learning process in the beginning. Once behaviors are established, food/toy rewards can be replaced with life rewards. The clicker can be replaced with a verbal marker like "yes" and "good dog". The clicker isn't used just for tricks. It is useful to teach house manners, public manners, all the way to obedience/agility competition.

MAKE THE CONTRACT

Before you decide to use a clicker, you must explain to your dog that the click is a wonderful thing. Make the contract that every time you click, your dog will receive a treat or other reinforcement.

First find a reinforcement that your dog **really** enjoys (not something *you* think he should enjoy). Many healthy choices are available such as Natural Balance Rolls. Your treats should be soft, tiny (pea-size), and have a large cut up supply of them before you start training. Look in our store for more ideas.

Ready to get started? Find a quiet place to start. Set a timer for 5 minutes. Keep your sessions short. Give your dog one click and a treat (c/t) simultaneously. Repeat several times until your dog is eagerly waiting for the next click. These c/ts are freebies just to make the contract.

Now you can begin to train simple behaviors. Wait for your dog to look at you and c/t. You can train attention which is the foundation to all future behaviors. Timing of the click is essential. You get what you click for. Remember that the click tells the dog which behavior got him that tasty reward. Click too early and you may get a dog that never looks at you! Click during the behavior...right when he makes eye contact with you. Then treat.

***SIDE NOTE:** Some dogs may be afraid of the noise so get educated before you use it.

HOW TO TEACH A NEW BEHAVIOR

Get the behavior: Watch for when your dog offers the behavior or even gets a part of it...then click/treat (c/t). You can lure the behavior but stop luring after one or two times. Put a leash on your dog to avoid unwanted behaviors(jumping/running off). Wait a moment for your dog to offer again, then c/t. When the light bulb goes on in your dog's head, move on.

Change the picture: Dogs don't generalize well. You must train this new behavior in a variety of places with a variety of factors. Many dogs get used to their owners sitting on the couch. Change the picture by moving outside or go to the park.

Give it a name: When your dog is doing the behavior in a predictable manner, give it a name. Match the word during the behavior, then c/t. For instance, watch for the butt to hit the ground, say "sit", then c/t. Then give the cue earlier and see if your dog gets it right. If not, wait for your dog to figure it out. Don't repeat your word!! Wait. When he gets it right, c/t. Then go back to matching the word during the behavior for awhile until your dog really understands.

Making it harder: Start delaying your c/t to get a longer duration of the behavior (like a sit/stay). Raise your standards which could be a quicker sit or sitting while you have your back turned. Also, start adding distractions. Whenever necessary, go back and make it easy if your dog fails.

BEGINNING BEHAVIORS TO TRAIN

Sit To Greet People	Down
Stay on your Mat	Sit at Door
Come when called	Fetch
Loose Leash Walking	Quiet
Leave It (Don't grab)	Rollover

CROSS-OVER TRAINERS

Did you train your last dog using corrections and a choke chain? Intrigued by this new way to train your dog? You are not alone. I too started out training dogs using corrections 15 years ago. I then got educated by the best and found a better way. It's called crossing over. I am one of thousands of trainers who now collect their title ribbons knowing that their dogs had fun along the way. Get help by signing up for one of our many popular programs. Using positive reinforcement probably seems natural to use towards your human companions and kids but a little foreign with your dog. Take one our classes to get unique insight into how dogs learn and how to clicker train your dog. You will improve your relationship and get the results you want.

This pamphlet is meant as an introduction to training. Treating aggression and using behavior modification requires a skilled teacher to show you the way. Ask us for a consultation.

For more information: come visit us at 23171 Arroyo Vista, RSM or log on at www.wagsandwiggles.com ©2002WWDD,Ilc