

THE INNER DOG



POSITIVE SOLUTIONS FOR NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

POSITION STATEMENT

Force-Free, Trust-Based, Positive Reinforcement Training

I firmly believe that dog training built on a positive relationship is the most kind – and also the most effective – method of training. When you have a positive relationship with your dog, you have your dog's trust, and your dog wants to spend time with you and work with you. Training based on physical punishment or aversive discipline negates any sort of positive relationship you might develop with the animal. **Positive reinforcement techniques deliver the most effective and reliable training results.**

By reinforcing behaviors that you like and want to continue seeing, you set the dog up for success. Positive relationship-based training is effective for teaching new behaviors or changing current behavior for any physically and mentally healthy animal. Regardless of an animal's age and past experiences, positive training methods give an animal the best chance for success at living happily and comfortably in our hectic human world.

What is relationship-based training? It is a method of training that uses the positive relationship between the trainer and the dog to achieve results that benefit both the dog and the trainer, while at the same time enhancing and strengthening their relationship. Here are some of the basic principles:

- ***Your dogs' immediate needs come first.*** Is your dog injured, ill, fearful, frustrated, hungry, thirsty, needing to eliminate? Put off training until your dog's needs have been met and your dog can concentrate on the training exercise.
- ***Learn to interpret your dog's body language.*** There are telltale signs that let you know how your dog is feeling – whether it's joy, anger, fear, frustration or some other emotion. Understanding body language improves communication between people and animals, and helps keep both animals and people safe.
- ***Find out what motivates your dog (affection, treats, play, toys) and use it to your advantage.***
- ***Use positive reinforcement to encourage behavior you like.*** You can elicit and reinforce desired behavior through the techniques of luring, capturing, shaping and targeting. "Capturing" appropriate behavior means using praise and other rewards to encourage recurrence of the behavior. "Shaping" involves rewarding each tiny bit of progress that the dog makes toward behavior you want. "Targeting" is a technique that helps to shape a dog's behavior by getting him to focus on a "target" and then perform a certain behavior.
- ***Punishment is not necessary for eliminating undesirable behaviors.*** Instead, ignore the behavior and/or teach incompatible behaviors. For example, teach the dog to sit for a greeting rather than jumping up – it's difficult for him to do both. To reinforce the desired behavior, reward with praise or treats. In contrast to punishment-based

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training, this approach supports the positive relationship between you and the dog.

- **Prevent your dog's ability to continue practicing unwanted behaviors by controlling the environment and controlling the dog's exposure.** For example, distract your dog or limit access to a window, door or fence line if there are inappropriate behaviors happening there. Supervise your dog carefully to set her up for success. You can avoid or prevent unwanted behaviors by simply being aware of what your dog is doing. For example, if a new dog or puppy is not house-trained, don't allow her the full run of the house until she has been house-trained. Giving a dog too much freedom can set her up for failure.
- **Practice, practice, practice!** Don't wait for the occasional chance to work on modifying your dog's behavior. Instead, create behavior modification opportunities so you can help your dog become more comfortable.
- **Use distraction to take your dog's attention off an anxiety-provoking situation.** For example, if your dog is afraid of children and you see a child walking toward your dog, you can distract the dog with praise or treats before the child approaches and as the child is passing. If you use this technique routinely, meeting children will become less and less stressful for the dog. In some cases, it may even become enjoyable.

Positive trainers also have realistic expectations. When training dogs, we use patience – we understand that animals are not born knowing how to fit into our human lives. Most adult dogs have not been properly taught how to be part of a loving human family. Even if they have been in a loving home, they may still lack the social skills to be comfortable around strangers and in new situations. Expecting your dog to know everything is unrealistic and punishing your dog for not knowing something is unfair. In relationship-based training, every dog is seen as an individual and the trainer works with your dog on that basis.

There are training methods that I will **not** use after seeing their detrimental effects on dogs. These methods can cause confusion in a dog, lack of trust, breakdown of the relationship, physical injury, fear and so-called "unpredictable" behavior. Examples include:

- Dominance and physical force:
 - Pushing a dog into a sit or down position
 - Alpha rolls
 - Physical punishment (hitting, kicking, slapping, hanging, leash pops, finger jabs)
- Leash corrections
- Harsh tones, verbal reprimands
- Methods that rely on inflicting pain, such as pinch/prong collars, choke chains and electric collars

Besides the negative effect on the dogs, and the fact that these techniques don't work over the long-term, these methods have resulted in injury to people and death to dogs. How? People who use these techniques are injured when the dogs fight back by biting. It's not uncommon for these people to euthanize their dogs after deciding they could no longer trust them.

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Finally, the success rate for positive, relationship-based training greatly exceeds that of punishment- or discipline-based training. Many, many research studies – dating back to Pavlov’s famous experiments with dogs – have confirmed that **positive reinforcement techniques deliver the most effective and reliable training results.**

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