



Pooch and Parent Training 101



Dogs typically receive some basic training during their stay at the shelter for fun, as enrichment activities, and to prepare them for their life with your family. You may enjoy continuing the training with your new pet, so here's the lowdown on your pooch's path toward good manners.

Our training philosophy

We use positive, force-free training methods. A positive approach can teach a dog to love learning. It is much easier to train a dog who enjoys lessons. When a canine's human interactions are pleasant, they can strengthen the bond between pet and guardian. Positive reinforcement training utilizes play, treats and praise to reward desired results. For the best outcome, the reward should be given within one second of the dog completing a command. This helps the dog learn the connection between the behavior and reward.

Remember that dogs don't speak English, so we need to help them learn what "Sit," "Down" and other words mean. One way to do this is by using a treat to lure them into position (instructions to follow). They first need to learn to pay special attention when you hold a treat and make a particular movement with your hand. Then, you can add in the command word.

Here at the shelter, we use a sound that lets dogs know the behavior just presented was exactly what we were looking for. The second a dog's behind hits the ground in a "sit," for example, we say, "Yes!" and then give them a yummy treat. Remember, treats should be kept small—each should be no larger than the size of a pea.

Read on to see how it all fits together.

Teach Your Dog to Sit:

Sit is a wonderful command to start with when beginning basic training and relatively easy to teach. Many other commands can be added once a dog knows how to sit reliably.

1. Find a quiet area with no distractions.
2. Hold a highly desirable treat between your thumb and pointer finger.
3. Make sure your dog has all four paws on the floor.
4. With your palm facing upward in front of your dog's nose, slowly raise the treat up above his or her head.
5. As the treat rises, your dog will naturally look up to follow it. This will force your pet into a sit.
6. When your dog's rump hits the floor, immediately say, "Yes!" and offer the treat.
7. Repeat, repeat, repeat. As your dog starts to learn what you are asking, he or she will sit for the treat faster and faster.
8. Once your dog is sitting for the raised treat 90% of the time, introduce the command "Sit" while using the hand signal. Continue to say, "Yes!" and reward with a treat when your dog sits.
9. To wean your dog off training-based treats, mix it up. First offer a treat every other time your pet sits, then after sitting three or four times in a row, and then back to every time. Your dog won't know when to expect a treat and will work for it every time.



Troubleshooting:

If your dog backs away from the treat rather than looking up at it, move him or her into a corner. This will force your pet to move his or her head up (and rump down) to follow the treat as it rises. Never forcibly push your dog into a sit.

Teach Your Dog to Lie Down:

"Down" is a command best taught once your dog already has a solid grip on the "Sit" command.

The hand signal is an open palm facing down starting at the waist and lowering toward the ground.

1. In a quiet area, put your dog into a sitting position.
2. Hold a yummy treat between the palm and thumb of your hand, and with your palm facing downward slowly move the treat from your dog's nose, down to the ground between his or her front paws.
3. Once the treat is there, be patient; it may take a few seconds for your dog to realize that it would be more comfortable to eat lying down.
4. As soon as your dog is in the "Down" position say, "Yes!" and allow him or her to eat the treat.
5. Repeat, repeat, repeat.
6. Once your dog is reliably lying down to eat the treat, introduce the "Down" command.
7. Once your dog is responding to the combination of the hand signal and command, use just the verbal command without the hand signal.
8. Once your dog is responding to both the hand and verbal signals separately, alternate between them for continued reinforcement.



Teach Your Dog to Come:

Teaching your dog to come when called may prove to be the most important exercise you practice together. If your dog ever gets loose, a “Come” command may be the difference between a tragedy and a happy reunion.

The hand signal for “Come” is extending your arm and then bringing your hand toward your chest.

1. Take your dog to an empty room or distraction-free fenced-in area and drop the leash.
2. Walk away from your dog, and then using his or her name, call, “Max, come!” in a loud, happy voice while giving the hand signal.
3. As soon as your dog starts moving toward you, say, “Yes!” Once your dog reaches you, immediately take him or her by the leash or collar, offer a bunch of small, delicious treats, and then say, “Okay!”
4. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

Troubleshooting:

If your dog starts to follow you and you are unable to increase your distance, have a second handler hold your pet and release the leash when you call, “Max, come!”

If your dog does not respond when called, you may need to use a higher-value treat, such as pieces of cheese or hot dog. And be aware of the tone of your voice. The key is to sound happy, not angry! You can also try kneeling down as you call, “Come!”

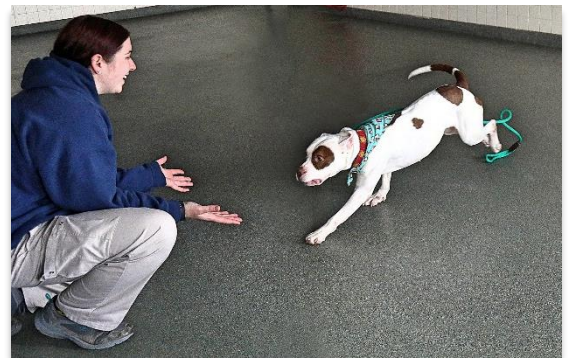
Advanced:

Once your dog is reliably coming when called, practice in an area with more distractions, such as other people or animals. The use of a long lead is especially helpful if you are working outside. You can also drop the verbal command and practice using just the hand signal. This is helpful if your dog is ever out of ear-shot.

The “Come” Game:

If playing alone, ask your dog to sit and stay, then walk away. Call, “Max, come!” As your dog starts running toward you, say, “Yes!” When your pet reaches you, grab his or her leash or collar and reward the behavior with lots of yummy treats and praise. Repeat.

If playing with two handlers, stand opposite from each other and take turns calling your dog back and forth. Always reward with lots of tasty treats or praise.



Teach Your Dog Hand Targeting:

Hand targeting is both useful and fun! Hand targeting can be the basis for teaching more advanced tricks, such as turning off and on lights or “dancing.” It can be useful when trying to lure your dog onto a scale at the vet’s office, but also makes for a unique party trick!

1. Hold an open hand in front of your dog about two inches away from his or her nose.
2. Your dog will likely move forward to sniff your hand. The instant you feel your pet’s nose touch your palm, say, “Yes!” and reward with a treat.
3. Repeat, repeat, repeat.
4. Once your dog is reliably touching his or her nose to your palm, add in the command, “Touch!” when offering your palm.
5. Repeat the exercise, gradually moving your palm further and further away from your dog’s nose. Never move your hand to your dog; always wait for your dog’s nose to come to you.
6. Once your dog is reliably touching his or her nose to your palm on command, start moving your hand into different positions: a little to the right, a little to the left, above your pet’s head, down low. Always have your palm facing the dog. Continue to reward each touch with, “Yes!” and treats or praise.



Troubleshooting:

If your dog doesn’t seem interested in touching his or her nose to your hand, try a higher-value treat, such as pieces of cheese or hot dog. You can rub the treat into your palm to make it smell more interesting.



Additional information and training advice can be found in the Care and Training section of our website, www.cthumane.org.