

The Secrets to Dog Training

© 2004 4Paws University, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.
© San Diego Humane Society

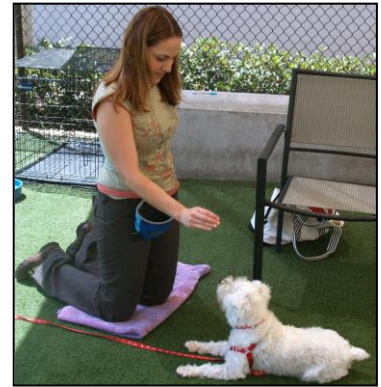
Almost every question I am asked as a dog trainer starts with “How do I get my dog to...?” While the specific answers can vary as much as the specific problems, there are certain components of dog training which are pretty universal.

Patience.

Training your dog takes time and commitment. There is no magic collar or harness or piece of equipment that is going to suddenly make your dog behave the way you want her to. **You have to put in the time and effort to teach your dog the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.**

Reinforcement.

Dogs do what works for them. **As their leader, you must always be aware of the behaviors you are reinforcing.** For example, if your dog nudges your hand and then you pet her, she will continue nudging your hand every time she wants attention. If your dog barks at you and you throw the ball, your dog will continue to bark so you throw the ball. In both of these examples, you have reinforced your dog’s behavior by responding just as your dog wanted you to. (Which begs the question: who is training who here?)



Timing.

Dogs live in the moment. That ability to live in the present moment, without holding a grudge is one of their most endearing qualities. However, it also means that **if you want to reward a good behavior or discourage unwanted behavior, you have to do it immediately.** Two minutes later won’t work, five minutes later won’t work, and one hour later certainly won’t work.

Some studies have shown you have approximately .5 to 1.5 seconds to associate a particular cause and effect with dogs. Because dogs live in the present moment, they believe that they are being rewarded or corrected for whatever they are doing in the moment that the reward or correction happens, not what they did 60 seconds ago. This means, to effectively train your dog, your timing has to be very good. If it takes you 10 seconds to dig the treat out of your pocket, it’s likely that you’ve missed the moment to reward your dog.

Consistency.

Dogs thrive on rules. **If you are not consistent with letting your dog know what behaviors are acceptable, your dog is never going to figure it out.** If you don’t want your dog to jump on you in your good clothes, she can’t be allowed to jump on you in your jeans. The rules have to be consistent, whatever you have defined them to be. If you are inconsistent, you will set up a behavior that is almost impossible to extinguish.

If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,
San Diego Humane Society is here to help!
Visit our website at www.sdhumane.org to view our behavior and training options,
or call our **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.