



Doggie Fact Sheet

Dogs learn by something being successful/rewarding or unsuccessful/unrewarding. These rewards can be internal such as the thrill of chasing a rabbit or can be given by us such as food/toys/attention. Therefore, if a dog does something that they find rewarding they will repeat this behaviour. If it is unsuccessful the behaviour will become extinct.

This is really important to remember because we can very easily reward behaviours we don't like without realising. For example, you are sitting watching TV and your dog is chewing nicely on a chew toy. Then your dog decides to go and chew a chair leg/jump on the sofa/destroy a pot plant etc etc etc, you then say "no, stop doing that" (or similar words) and the dog learns that to gain your attention he needs to do that behaviour rather than sit quietly chewing his bone. What should happen is that when your dog is doing something you like, you must reinforce it. So in this example when your dog is chewing on his toy, then you could verbally say good boy or stroke him. He will then learn that chewing on appropriate toys is successful and therefore he will repeat. Of course I am not suggesting that you just let your dog destroy your house because you cannot say no, but I would advise that you simply distract him from doing whatever it was you didn't like and show him what he should be doing instead i.e. game with you or chewing his bone. He gains most attention when doing it 'right'. If your dog becomes focused on a particular thing, such as a table leg, then your dog doesn't have access to the table leg. You can simply then not let the dog have access to that part of the house when unsupervised. This is where crate training can really help you (see crate training information sheet), or use stair gates, so that your dog cannot get it wrong. He will soon forget about that focus and you can eventually give the dog free access to your house.

How can you reward your dog?

Food. Toys/games. Attention (verbal praise, physical touching, and even looking at your dog).

Food – most dogs enjoy food, and therefore we can use this to help us train behaviours we like. Anything from teaching a sit or recall through to high level competition sports such as agility or obedience. You need to find what food your dog really likes. Examples are: cheese, ham, sausage, chicken, liver cake, raw carrot etc. You can use shop bought dog biscuits, but I would suggest that what you can find in your fridge is usually better. I also use my dogs usual dried dog food as rewards, but only when the distraction level is low i.e. training at home with no other dogs/people around. Feed very small pieces of food when you want to 'mark' a behaviour you like. For example, your dog sits his bottom on the floor, you would then feed him a piece of food – reward him for sitting. When your dog comes back to you, he earns a piece of food. Anything you like, you can reward him with food. Once you are sure your dog has learnt this behaviour, you can then gradually reduce the amount of times you reward him with food. Sometimes they will get 3 pieces of food (because they did it really well) and sometimes you will just verbally say 'good dog'. We don't want your dog to become food dependent i.e. only working for you if you have food in your hand. However, I do find that most people think their dogs know something and stop rewarding them for it too soon. A classic example is recall. So when there are no distractions around, you call your dog and they come back. However, when there are other dogs/people/ squirrels around they don't come back. Therefore they don't know recall yet in all environments -more training is needed before you reduce food treats.

Toys – I think these are often overlooked as rewards. Doesn't matter whether it's a tug toy, or ball, or squeaky toy, as with food, find out what your dog really likes. You can now use this toy to reward your dog for 'getting it right'. I very much encourage you to have daily games with your dogs, it will help you build a great relationship. I often have owners tell me that my dog plays great inside the house, but not on a walk. I would then suggest that interactive games only happen whilst on a walk, and the dog's favourite toy only appears when out on a walk. Put their 'special' toy away and not just lying around on the floor. If left on the floor then you are devaluing the toy because the dog can have it whenever they want. Take this toy out on walks, and you can then play with your dog outside. This will help you with recall – call your dog, and the reward for coming back is a game of tug with their favourite toy. Some dogs are toy obsessed and will play all day and night and others need to learn that playing games are fun!

Attention - talking (verbal praise), looking at your dog, touching him are all forms of attention. Remember this when training – what are you rewarding? Is it really what you want to reward? A good example of owners giving attention for what they don't want is when your dog jumps up to greet you. You probably push the dog off and say "off" – you have now rewarded your dog for jumping up, and your dog will now be more likely to repeat this because it was successful. If you don't want your dog to jump up, you and everyone your dog meets (which is usually the hardest part!) isn't allowed to give your dog attention for jumping up. If your dog runs up to you and jumps, simply turn your back on your dog (they will still probably jump up) but you are not giving it any attention, when your dog has 4 feet on the floor, turn and now give attention – stroking/verbal praise. The most difficult thing about this is controlling everyone you meet. You must be confident when asking people to not stroke your dog whilst jumping up – the usual response is "I don't mind", your answer is – "I do!" As said above, if your dog isn't successful when they jump up, this behaviour will eventually stop. You have to be consistent.

Socialisation

If you have a puppy, then I cannot stress the importance of getting her used to daily life – that is what socialising your puppy means. Up to the age of 16 weeks your puppy will be like a sponge and soak up all new experiences that it comes across. After 16 weeks your puppy may become fearful of new situations therefore you must get your puppy out and about as soon as possible. Before she has had her full course of vaccinations, you must be careful, but you can carry your puppy around with you. You need to get her used to everything she will meet in her lifetime – yes that is a long list!

Some examples are: **dogs** (friends/family dogs that have been vaccinated and good with other dogs are fine to mix with) **people** (lots of different looking people, such as young and old, wheelchair users, men with beards, glasses etc.), **livestock, traffic, shops, car travel, umbrellas, loud noises** (guns, fireworks, roadworks etc.), **fluorescent jackets, bikes, hoover, washing machine** etc etc etc!!! The list is endless really, but think about what you want your dog to be good at, and work from there. Don't overwhelm your puppy; socialising doesn't mean throwing them into a situation e.g. letting 10 children rush over screaming "puppy!" – that will be scary. Introduce slowly. Let your puppy take its time to adjust to what is around her. Stop and let her look at it. Enjoy introducing your puppy to the environment it must adjust to living in – remember, it has probably only been with its mother and litter mates in a house, so some things make take some time to get used to.

Feeding routine

Puppies need to be fed 4 times a day until about 12 weeks, then move to 3 meals a day moving to 2 meals around the age of 6 months. I keep my dogs at 2 meals a day; morning & tea time. Check the feeding guidelines for how much to feed. Remember this is just a guide line and some dogs will eat more than the recommended and keep a good weight whilst others will need less. Remember, if you are feeding extras during the day when you are training, this needs to be taken into account with their daily food allowance.

DO NOT leave food down in their bowl all day. This will devalue the food because your dog has access to it whenever they want. It will also make your dog a fussy eater. At meal times, put the food down and give your dog 10 minutes to finish it. If they have walked away, then pick bowl up. You can then feed them what they haven't finished with their next meal. They are still getting their daily food allowance. If you feed a dried food, then some dogs prefer it wet – I would suggest warm water because it then makes the food smell good. Others don't like it wet – find out what your dog prefers. If your dog doesn't finish the meal, don't be tempted to add something 'nice' to encourage your dog to eat up. Dogs will learn to wait until you add something 'nice' before they will eat at all. Dogs do not starve themselves, they will eat if they are hungry.

What brand of dog food to feed is a hot topic and you will find lots of information of what's good and what's not on the internet. There are certainly some rubbish dog foods available on the market – remember, dog food is marketed to humans, dogs don't care what colour the packet is or if the pieces of food are multi coloured! Read the ingredients. Do your research. Don't just follow what the breeder or vet or your neighbour told you. My general rule is if you can buy it in a supermarket then it's probably not the best. Brands I can confidently recommend are: Burns, Wainwrights, Naturediet, Barking Heads, Orijen, Eden, Canagan and Arden Grange. This is not a complete list, just my suggestions. There is also the choice of whether to feed raw. All I ask, is that you consider what you are feeding your dog, read the labels and remember that dog food is a billion pound industry and companies are trying to persuade you to buy their product! If you do change your dog's diet, it should be done gradually over about a 1 week period, slowly introducing the new food and slowly reducing the old food. If your dog has an upset stomach, then make the change over a longer time.

The Dominance theory

In the late 1960's a theory was released that as dogs are related to wolves they must be treated like a wolf. The concept of 'pack' or being 'alpha' became very popular and took hold of many dog trainers and scientists alike. Over the last 50 years studies of the domestic dog have moved on and it has been well established that the social behaviour of the domestic dog is unlike that of the wolf. This means that thinking you must be 'pack leader' and 'dominate' your dog is not very useful and can potentially be very harmful to the relationship with your dog. Your dog knows you are not another dog. Yes some dogs can be pushy, manipulative and opportunistic – this doesn't mean they are trying to take over the world! Dogs need to have set boundaries to help them understand this confusing human world they live in. We also need to be fair and consistent and by doing this we will have a happy and contented dog.

If you have any questions about the above, please don't hesitate to contact me – Jo 07919157201 or info@paws4teaching.co.uk