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Correcting your Dog

Humans are the only species that refuses to use punishment as a means of correction. All animals reprimand their young. Dogs bite each other, horses bite and kick each other, lions and tigers, bite and wrestle each other; humans just nag and “talk about it”.

When raising a dog, you must treat them the way their mother would. Your dog’s mother would nip, bite and keep her puppy in a down/rolled over position for any indiscretion, no matter how small. All misbehaviour is reprimanded with the same level of correction.

Most individuals are so averse to correction that they are creating monster canines who are dog aggressive, people aggressive and downright dangerous to have in society. And, when they do correct the action either doesn’t affect the dog or stop the misbehaviour. Furthermore the timing is so bad the dog has no clue why he was corrected. Not helping the situation are these so-called behaviourists telling society to remove all forms of correction, ignore it and just reward good behaviour. Shaping is not going to correct dog aggressiveness or to stop unwanted behaviour.

Different types of correction

No training can be 100% positive because all dogs test to see how much they can get away with. The difference is the amount or type of compulsion that is necessary. To some dogs a stern voice is compulsion enough, other dogs may require a stronger form of correction. The definition of compulsion depends upon the dog and his sensitivity. The correction should immediately stop the disobedience.

If your dog returns to this behavior, then your correction was not meaningful enough. If the verbal correction is enough and your dog does not return to the disobedient behavior, then there is no reason to physically correct. But if your dog does return to being disobedient you didn’t make a big enough impression on him. It doesn’t matter what method of compulsion you use as long as your dog responds, respects and learns from the correction.

The correction should also fit the animal; you don't train a dog like you would a horse or a cat. Dog's bite and pin each other down by the neck, so you need to use a collar. A prong or pinch collar most resembles a 'dog bite' but sometimes a regular collar will do just as good; again it depends on the dog's temperament.

Right Timing and Marking Behavior

The most important step of training is to be 100% certain that your dog understands what you want from him. If your dog is confused or stressed, he is almost certainly going to make mistakes, this is not disobedience. Therefore you must acknowledge or mark good behavior, this reassures the dog and does not leave him wondering if he is doing a good job.

You can acknowledge his good behavior with praise and a reward of some type, food or ball or toys. Your dog's reward should be his most favorite thing. When your dog misbehaves or is disobedient, you must immediately reprimand him verbally and with some type of compulsion if necessary. All behavior must be acknowledged and marked verbally and physically if needed either with praise or correction. If the behavior objective is clear to your dog, then your dog will always respond.

Verbal Corrections

Whether you use the word 'No', 'Nein', 'Phooey', or 'Bad', your dog must realize that the verbal correction means to immediately stop his behavior. The only way for your dog to understand this concept is to be sure to correct him with a physical correction every time you say his verbal correction. Too many people say the word "No" but their dogs do not respond to it because there is no consequence. When I initially train a dog I always use the command "No" in conjunction with a physical correction with the leash. This way, the dog makes the association with the word and a correction. Eventually, the verbal correction is enough to stop the misbehavior.

Timing of correction

Right timing is very important. Ideally you should correct your dog when you catch him in the act and reward him as soon as he does the good behavior. That means, 100% focus on your dog, especially if you have an issue that you are working on i.e. growling, etc. You must immediately correct any form of aggression or misbehavior because, if not, then your dog will seek out opportunities when you are distracted to act out. You know how your Mom always said 'she had eyes in the back of her head'; you must be like Mom.

Rewards after a correction

If your dog understands what is expected of him or the command you just gave him, do not give a food reward if he needed a physical correction. Calm praise after a correction is all that is needed. Use your 'cheerleading' and food for when your dog willingly responds to your command versus needing a correction to respond.

A variable schedule of reward will create a consistent response from your dog. When teaching your dog a new command, you must reward each time he responds. Once the behavior is established you need to change your schedule of reinforcement to a variable or random schedule. On this schedule, the dog never knows when the reward is coming. It can come after repeating the behavior twice, 4 times, 1 time, 6 times, 3 times, etc. But you must start transferring to this variable schedule very gradually or you risk the extinction of the behavior/response.

Conclusion

In my opinion, no training can be without a correction because, like humans, all dogs test to see how much they can get away with. Testing is their best display of intelligence, instead of blindly following your every command; they are looking to see if there is a better option.

The difference in your dog's attitude and obedience to commands is going to come from his understanding of what you want him to do, his desire for the reward you offer him and the compulsion used. A dog that is confused will never have success. Hard corrections only are not going to make your dog perfect or obedient and all rewards are not going to do it either. Once your dog understands what you want from him you must find the correct balance of the reward and correction for your dog to have him working happily and consistently for you.