

Puppy School Puppy Advice

Reward-based training

Reward-based training relies on finding something your puppy wants so that it tries hard to get it. Careful positioning of the reward and good timing allows you to reward the correct behaviour, making your puppy want to repeat it. The required behaviour can then be put on cue.

Owner objections

There are some objections to the use of food or rewards in training, for example, some owners feel it is bribery and that the puppy will never learn to work for their approval, while others feel that you will always need to go out for walks armed with pockets full of treats and toys to reward good behaviour. None of these objections have any foundation once you get reward-based training right. In reality, food and rewards are used only to teach our puppies what we want them to do and, later, once the action is well learned, we can reduce the rewards given to a manageable level.

Using food

During puppy classes, many food treats will be needed to lure the puppy into doing the correct action so that it can be rewarded. Puppies will work for small rewards so make sure the treats are the size of a small pea (slightly larger for large puppies) so that they don't get full up too quickly. Puppies will work harder for smelly, moist food. Try:

- Cheese
- Cooked sausage
- Liver sausage
- Cooked chicken
- Liver, cooked and dried
- Prepared treats such as Smackos

If you introduce enough treats straight away to keep your puppy working for a class that lasts 1 hour, it may upset his stomach. For this reason, try to introduce the treat foods gradually over the week before the lessons starts. Find out what your puppy likes best and use the best rewards for the hardest exercises.

Using Games

Most puppies will work for food but some are more interested in playing than eating. If your puppy is like this, you will need to use games with toys to encourage your puppy to work for you. The important reward from the puppy's point of view is the game rather than acquiring the toy, so be sure to give the puppy a good game with the toy when he does the right thing, rather than just handing over the toy. Games that puppies enjoy fall into 3 categories:

- Chase
- Tug
- Squeaky toy games

Be sure to use your puppy's favourite game for training (be careful with developing puppy mouths if you are using tug games and don't pull too hard).

The Importance of Praise

Food and games are useful as a way of beginning the training for helping the puppy understand what you want him to do. However, the main objective is to get your puppy working for you because he wants to please you. To do this, you need to develop a relationship with your puppy and let him know when you are pleased when he does something correctly. As soon as you begin training, use praise in addition to the rewards offered. As your training develops and you begin to reduce the rewards given, your puppy will rely on your praise to know that he has done the right thing. Developing a good relationship with your puppy, based on love and respect, will help to ensure that he keeps working well for your praise, especially if he is encouraged by periodic rewards and occasional special treat for doing the right thing

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