

Advice To Using Positive Reinforcement And Rewards To Train Your Dog

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Training dogs using positive reinforcement and reward training has long been recognized as both highly effective for the owner and a positive experience for the dog. Positive reinforcement training is so important that it is the only method used to train dangerous animals like lions and tigers for work in circuses and in the movie and television industry.

Proponents of positive reinforcement swear by the effectiveness of their techniques, and it is true that the vast majority of dogs respond well to these training methods.

One reason that positive reinforcement training is so effective is that it uses rewards to teach the dog what is expected of it. When the dog performs the desired behavior, it is provided with a reward, most often in the form of a food treat, but it could be a scratch behind the ears, a rub under the chin or a pat on the head as well. The important thing is that the dog is rewarded consistently for doing the right thing.

Reward training has become increasingly popular in recent years, but chances are some sort of reward training between humans and dogs has been going on for hundreds if not thousands of years.

When understanding what makes reward training so effective, some knowledge of the history of humans and dogs is very helpful. The earliest dogs were probably wolf pups that were tamed and used by early humans for protection from predators, as alarm systems and later for guarding and herding livestock.

It is possible that the wolf pups that made the best companions were the most easily trained, or it is possible that these early dogs were orphaned or abandoned wolf pups. Whatever their origin, there is little doubt today that the vast variety of dogs we see today have their origin in the humble wolf.

Wolf packs, like packs of wild dogs, operate on a strict pack hierarchy. Since wolf and dog packs hunt as a group, this type of hierarchy, and the cooperation it brings, is essential to the survival of the species. Every dog in the pack knows his or her place in the pack, and except in the event of death or injury, the hierarchy, once established, rarely changes.

Every dog, therefore, is hard wired by nature to look to the pack leader for guidance. The basis of all good dog training, including reward based training, is for the handler to set him or herself up as the pack leader. The pack leader is more than just the dominant dog, or the one who tells all the subordinates what to do.

(To Be Continued...)

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