

TRI-STATE DOG OBEDIENCE CLUB

ORIENTATION

WHY OBEDIENCE?

Obedience builds a bond between dog and handler that normally does not exist. It is a form of communication understood by both dog and handler. The dog learns to associate certain works with certain actions. Once this communication is established, many behavior problems can be corrected.

Training your dog is like teaching someone English. Your success depends upon 1) your understanding of the subject matter, 2) the consistency with which you convey your message, and 3) the amount of patience you have with your pupil. You will learn how to train your dog in class; he will learn at home.

COMMANDS/SIGNALS

Commands are the verbal tools you will use to convey your message. They must be clear, firm and pleasant. They will never be harsh or angry. The commands your instructor will teach you are the same commands used in obedience classes everywhere. They are SIT, DOWN, STAY, STAND, COME, HEEL. In addition to the verbal commands, hand signals will also be taught. These must also be clear and without harshness. Do not nag a dog by repeating the command over and over. To avoid the need to repeat a command, be sure you have the dog's attention before giving the command.

REWARDS AS POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Just as you would never accept a job working 40 hours a week for no pay, neither would your dog. His paycheck is not money, it is food, toys, pets and verbal praise. A *REINFORCEMENT* is something that increases or strengthens a particular behavior in the dog. Food treats are a dog's **primary** reinforcer, as food is something that all dogs need to survive; it is a tangible reward that the dog will understand. Verbal praise should be used in conjunction with the food reward as praise will become your dog's **secondary** reinforcer, or *conditioned* reinforcer. Your verbal praise will become much more meaningful when you pair it with a food reward when teaching a behavior. The more generous you are with it, the happier he will be to do his job. Whatever words you choose, they should be happy, encouraging, and most of all, SINCERE.

Once a behavior, such as coming when called, is learned by the dog, the paychecks should not end; the dog must continue to be rewarded on a **random** basis in order for the behavior to continue. Once a behavior is learned, the best way to maintain it is to reward it randomly, and with different types of rewards. Various rewards would include things such as verbal praise, tactile praise (petting, etc.), a piece of kibble, a favorite toy, 5 pieces of kibble, a piece of cheese or chicken, a game of tug...the possibilities *are* and *should be* ENDLESS! "**Various reinforcements on a variable schedule**" is the golden rule to maintain a learned behavior.

THE RELEASE

The release is a verbal command coupled with a physical action that breaks the dog out of an exercise.

Enthusiastic praise is given and the dog is encouraged to jump up and play for just a moment. In teaching the dog any exercise, it is essential to define the beginning AND the end of the exercise so the dog clearly understands what is expected of him. You must always be the one to decide when an exercise is finished, not the dog.

Therefore, do not allow the dog to "break" BEFORE you release him. Without a RELEASE, the dog will learn that the owner is in charge of when things begin, but not when they end. Your release word, as with all commands, should be consistent. Examples are: "OK!", "FREE!", "ALL DONE!". Do not confuse praise ("Good Dog!" "Excellent!") with the release. When releasing the dog, release UPWARDS to keep dog up and focused on you.

FRAME OF MIND

Dogs often mirror our moods; when you are happy, so is he. When you are depressed, he will be also. A happy dog wags his tail, while a sad dog will plod along doing what is expected of him but not very happily. If you are annoyed or depressed, it is best to wait until you feel better before you work with your dog. You'll both feel better for it!

EQUIPMENT

Purchase proper training equipment.

Collar - Buckle collar (leather or nylon, flat or rolled).

Leash - Also called a "lead", it should be made of leather and be between 2' and 4' long. It is made of leather because of its strength, durability, and ease on your hands.

PREPARING YOUR DOG FOR CLASS

1. Your dog will work better if he is not fed for 4 hours before class. Dogs don't work well on a full stomach, not to mention that the excitement can activate his bowels!
2. Allow him to relieve himself before class to avoid accidents. If an accident should occur in class, we will be glad to hold your dog for you while you clean it up. We will provide cleaning materials. Place waste **outside** in trash can.
3. Wear soft-soled shoes (ie: sneakers) to provide better traction for you and to avoid injuring your dog should you accidentally step on him. (No sandals, please.) Also wear comfortable clothing; layers are a good choice in the colder weather as you **WILL** get warm while working your dog.
4. Keep your dog's immunizations up to date (DHLP, Parvo, Rabies) to protect him.
5. **ASK** your instructor if anything taught in class is not clear.
6. Purchase proper training equipment. Leash-train your dog; see the following section for instruction.
7. Bring LOTS of tasty food treats for your dog to class. The best kinds of treats are something very small and not crunchy; the idea is to be able to reward the dog quickly and have him ready immediately to continue.
 **GOOD IDEAS: Small bits of cheese, hot dogs, chicken, steak, liver, Natural Balance® Dog Food Roll.**
(Kibble is fine IF your dog finds it exciting enough!)
-  **BAD IDEAS: Milkbones, hard biscuits, crackers.**
8. **DO** call to let us know if you are going to miss class.
9. If the weather is bad, please call first to see if class has been cancelled. This is your responsibility; we will **TRY** to call you if class is cancelled, but this is not always possible. If no one can be reached at the Training Building, call your instructor at home. (It is best to call your instructor at home well before class is scheduled to begin.)
10. **DO** relax and have a good time! Don't waste energy comparing your dog to every other dog in class. Every dog learns at a different rate and every handler spends a different amount of time practicing at home.

LEASH TRAINING

Before you can do anything, you must be sure that your dog accepts the leash. If your dog already walks on a lead, you may disregard this section.

How To Acclimate Your Dog To A Leash

1. Attach the leash to his buckle collar. Let the dog drag it around the house as you follow to make sure he doesn't get tangled.
2. When he no longer minds this, pick up the handle of the leash and follow him, without letting the lead get tight.
3. When Step 2 is completed, it is time to get him to walk with you. Walk in any direction that you choose, encouraging him to come along using a tidbit of food, or a favorite toy, and happy words. Your dog's *introduction* to walking on a leash should be totally positive.
4. You will now be ready to learn **CONTROLLED WALKING** with your dog in the Beginners Class.

SUMMARY

1. Praise when your dog does something **RIGHT**.
2. Avoid repeating commands by not giving a command unless you have your dog's attention.
3. Look for the **GOOD** things your dog does and praise/reward for the **GOOD** things rather than focusing only on the bad things and getting angry at your dog. (He may learn that he only gets your attention for the "bad" things!)
4. When teaching your dog anything new, do it in a *distraction-free* environment. Change *locations* often but add the distractions very gradually.
5. Practice every day, keeping sessions short and fun. (Two or three 10-minute sessions a day is ideal.)
6. Keep your dog in peak health condition (free of external and internal parasites; coat brushed; toenails clipped).

AND.....**HAPPY HEELING!** 