A Brief Intro to Clicker Training

TRAINING TIPS

Why we click

- Clarity:
  The click is a neutral, brief, sound which can clearly indicate the behavior that pays off.

- Consistency:
  Each member of your family will say words such as "yes" and "good boy" a little differently, but a click will sound the same, no matter who is using the clicker.

- Bridging:
  Because the click indicates which behavior pays off we can buy a little time (a second or so) after the click to deliver the treat. The precision of the click allows for less precision in treat delivery.

When we click

- At the moment the dog is performing the desired behavior

- One great strategy for preventing your dog performing an *un*desired behavior is to click and reward preemptively while your dog is performing a desirable behavior, for example while they have all four paws on the floor at a time that they would normally jump up.

How we train

- The Big Three

  - Capture:
    Click and reward a desired behavior when it happens naturally. This is great for training your dog to perform behaviors on cue such as "down" or "sit".

  - Lure:
    Use food to entice your dog to move in a certain way, such as using a treat to draw his nose up to encourage a "sit".

  - Shape:
    Click and feed increasing approximations of the goal behavior. For example, if your goal is to train your dog to "sit", and you are using a lure, click and give him a little bit of the lure food in stages as he gets closer and closer to a full sit.

- Preemptively reward desired behaviors – catch your dog in the act of doing something good!

- Create opportunities to practice and reinforce desired behaviors, such as calling your dog to come when he is already on his way to you. Click, treat, and "have a party"!

- Avoid opportunities to practice undesired behaviors, such as "counter-surfing". Keep food and other enticing items away from the edge of the counter so your dog won't be tempted to help himself.

Definitions

- Reinforcement – makes the reoccurrence of a behavior more likely
- Punishment – makes the reoccurrence of a behavior less likely

- Positive Reinforcement   +R
  Something the dog likes is added, such as a food or play reward to reinforce a desired behavior.
- Negative Punishment   -P
  Something the dog likes is removed. An example would be pausing or ending a play session if the dog nips you.
- Negative Reinforcement   -R
  Something the dog finds unpleasant is removed.
- Positive Punishment   +P
  Something the dog doesn't like is added.

Note that at Joyful Dog our training methods emphasize Positive Reinforcement.

Why we don't use "positive punishment"

- Punishment raises stress/cortisol levels
- The increased stress makes undesirable behavior more likely
- There can be unintended consequences if timing isn't perfect
- Because of humane considerations

How we do punish

- Remove rewards
- Remove the dog from fun

Our general approach

Our approach is to mark and reward desired behavior, and to ignore undesired behavior(s). The reinforced (rewarded) behaviors will become more frequent, while the unrewarded behaviors will become less frequent.

Initially we use a high Rate of Reinforcement ("ROR"), which is timed to be a reward for behavior, much like a paycheck.

Note that many of the ways we humans instinctively respond to undesirable behaviors can actually reinforce the undesired behavior in canines! A prime example is yelling at a dog for barking, or pushing a jumping dog away. The barking dog gets attention when we yell, and may think that we, too, are barking, so it becomes, for him, a social activity. The jumping dog also gets attention when we push him away, as well as getting touch. In fact, pushing a jumping dog away will often intensify the jumping.

Be a detective!

If your dog is continuing a behavior that you don't like, look for what is reinforcing the behavior, and remove it from the picture. In the example above the things that we often do to stop our dog from barking or jumping are actually making the behavior more likely.