

CLICKER TRAINING...or Why it's quicker with a clicker!

A clicker is a small, handheld device that makes a metallic 'click' sound when you press it. Clicker training by simple definition is the pairing of a previously meaningless sound (the click) with something already meaningful and positive to your dog (food). The clicker becomes a *conditioned reinforcer*, which basically means that the click means FOOD! to Rover! We can then use the clicker to reinforce particular behaviors. Because the clicker makes a short, distinct sound it is very easy to pinpoint the specific behavior we want to reinforce. It is much more difficult (and sometimes impossible) to try to present a treat at the exact right time or to use praise effectively. In the amount of time it takes to say "What a good dog!" Rover can do several behaviors. How is he to know which one you liked? The clicker becomes a communication tool and makes learning occur quicker and easier. Every time you click/ treat a behavior you make it stronger. Every time you click/ treat a behavior you increase the likelihood of your dog repeating that behavior. *Behavior that is reinforced will increase in frequency* – That is a law just like the law of gravity! Clicker training is the most humane and effective training method for ALL animals - from chickens to dolphins to dogs!

After your dog is proficient at the behavior and you've put it on cue (verbal or hand) you can discontinue the clicker and just use an intermittent reward.

Getting Started:

"Charging the clicker" -To get started simply Click and toss a yummy treat to your dog! Move around the room. Click and treat often. You are not rewarding any particular behavior here, just pairing the click w/ the food. After many repetitions let your dog get distracted and then click again. If he turns toward you in anticipation of a food treat then he's starting to get the idea!

Begin *luring* or *cueing* simple behaviors like Sit or DOWN. Click the moment your dog is in position (fanny on ground for SIT/ elbows and fanny on ground for DOWN). The click is followed by a food treat.

The timing of the click is what is important, not the timing of the treat.

You can use the clicker to *shape* a behavior, which means that you reward small movements toward a final behavior. A good example of this is the behavior DOWN. Some dogs are hesitant to follow a food lure all the way into the down position, but will dip their head or bow. By reinforcing these incremental steps and building on them you can create the DOWN position.

With the clicker you can also *capture* any behavior that your dog offers on his own that you want to reward! So if Fido comes to you by his own choice while playing at the park, sits when he approaches you, lies down at your feet while you work on the computer, play bows rather than growling at your new puppy or offers any number of other desirable behaviors you can Click and Treat to reinforce that behavior. Your dog will be more likely to offer that behavior again!