

North Shore Veterinary Hospital

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Behaviour

Good communication builds good relationships

Just as between people, good relationships between dogs and their owners are based on good communication. Dogs communicate between themselves by means of body signals. It's only natural, then, that they'll use the same method to communicate with people. Your responsibility as a pet owner is to learn to interpret such signals. Doing so will enable you to teach your puppy or dog the appropriate way of telling you what he or she needs or would like, whether it's food, to be let out, to play or to receive some loving attention from you!

Good behaviour should be rewarded

Parents often don't remember to praise their children when they behave well, yet will never forget to tell them when they do not. We tend to do the same with our pets. We ignore them when they are quiet and well behaved and pay them attention only when they behave inappropriately. It's always best to do the reverse and praise and reward a desired behaviour, and ignore the unwanted.



Social skills aren't just for humans!

One of the most important lessons your puppy or dog should learn is that they must sit before interacting with you or any other human. You can easily teach a puppy or even a mature dog to sit. Dogs learn at any age, as long as lessons are repeated often enough and teaching sessions are short and fun.



Step 1

- To begin, take a very special food treat and hold it between the two fingers of a hand.
- Place this hand close to the front of your pet's nose.

Step 2

- Raise the hand above their nose and then backwards. Your pet's head will move to follow the treat.
- Eventually, your dog will sit, because it will be more comfortable.

Step 3

As soon as they do, say "sit" and give your pet their treat. As a dog always connects what they are doing with what you are doing at the same time, they'll associate the action of sitting with the word "sit" and a reward at this stage, the food treat.



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Unwanted behaviour should be ignored...

Dogs, just like humans, are social animals and need interaction with others, so withholding your attention is a very effective passive punishment. For example, if your dog jumps up on you, cross your arms, turn your head away and remain absolutely silent until they stop jumping. Don't try to push them away, look at or talk to them. They'll interpret any of these actions on your part as attention, or even play. When your pet does finally sit, reward them with your undivided attention and a treat of some kind.



If, in the past, you allowed your puppy or dog to gain your attention by barking or jumping up on you, you must realise that if you subsequently decide to ignore such behaviour, your pet will only try longer and harder to regain that attention. An analogy in human terms would be a person who presses the button of an elevator whose doors do not open. He or she will press the button repeatedly, before giving up and walking down the stairs. To successfully change your dog's behaviour, you must ignore—and outlast—all their efforts.



...Or interrupted

Dogs do react to eye contact. Call your puppy or dog by his or her name. As soon as they look at you, you should give them a special treat. Repeating this simple exercise at any time will teach your pet that it is worthwhile to pay attention to you. In fact, calling your pet's name is an effective way of interrupting, and thus eliminating, unwanted behaviour. Making an unusual sound is another way of interrupting. Once your dog is paying attention to you, you can ask them to come or sit.

Play takes training, too!



Puppies and dogs need to exercise and play and to have contact and interaction with both people and other dogs. They should be taught to play with toys only and should learn that human hands, feet or any other body part are not toys. If your pet grabs a hand or foot, either intentionally or accidentally, such behaviour should be interrupted either by withholding your attention (ignoring them) or by making a high-pitched "ouch" sound. As soon as they let go, offer a large toy and resume playing.

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