

## Finding the Right Trainer for Your Dog

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With so many options available, finding the best trainer for your new dog can be confusing. The first rule of thumb is to find a trainer that uses reward-based based methods of training. Look for words such as force-free, positive reinforcement, or clicker training in the class or method descriptions.

### WHAT IS A POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT?

Very simply stated, dog training techniques that use positive reinforcement teach the dog that good things happen when desirable behaviors occur. By generously rewarding behaviors that we want the dog to learn, undesirable behaviors will occur with less frequency and even hopefully, become extinct.

Without getting too technical, let's look at B.F Skinner's principles of operant conditioning. This is system of learning in which adding a reward increases a behavior and punishment decreases the behavior. Early dog training techniques relied primarily on punishment based methods, resulting in what appeared to be quick results. But through time, trainers discovered better methods that are more humane and pleasant for both the dog and trainer. Instead of expecting a dog to behave out of fear of punishment, positive reinforcement teaches the dog that compliance to our cues is fun and rewarding.

### WHY POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT?

Shelter dogs, in particular, often acquire fear issues and lack of confidence due to inconsistent handling or bad experiences. Adding fear of punishment can exacerbate these problems resulting in further conflict for the dog. An example of this is a dog that may act aggressively towards something out of fear to create space or distance. Using punishment may decrease the unwanted behavior but doesn't change the emotional response of the dog. Punishment actually makes behavior worse because fear shuts down the dog's ability to learn.

Using reward-based methods to change or modify behavior can achieve permanent results by actually changing the dog's emotional response from fear to confidence. It may require more time and patience to determine the cause of the behavior, but the results are lasting. Another bonus of using non-confrontational methods is a stronger partnership between dog and owner based on trust.

## How does it work?

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Creating a solid obedience foundation using a clicker or marker word is the first step.

- The clicker or marker word tells the dog precisely what it was doing right at that point in time and allows the handler to reinforce the behavior with the dog's favorite treat.
- Marking a behavior allows the handler to build desired behaviors that the dog needs to acquire.
- Negative tools are avoided because they are simply unnecessary to teach important life skills to the dog.

For behavior modification, rewards can be used from a distance to counter-condition a dog's fear of scary objects. Reinforced cued behaviors also can be used to teach the dog appropriate responses in other situations and unwanted behavior can be ignored to extinction.

For more information on Clicker Training and other behavior modification, see our training protocols and methods on the PAWS Chicago website under News & Resources, Protocols, or [pawschicago.org/protocols](http://pawschicago.org/protocols).

## What to Avoid When Looking For a Dog Trainer



Avoid trainers that use the word “dominance” or that guarantee results in a specific time frame. These trainers may put unnecessary pressure on the dog and resort to punishment, causing additional problems. Remember that punitive measures cause the dog pain, frustration and fear resulting in damage to the human-dog bond.

### Trainers that use the following methods should be avoided:

- Yanking a dog harshly
- Choke, prong, or shock collars
- Alpha rolls
- Kicking, swatting or hitting
- Rubbing a dog's nose in his excrement or urine for eliminating in the home
- Kneeing a dog in the chest for jumping

Remember that the best part of dog training is developing communication between the dog and trainer. Because the dog understands what he is being asked to do, he becomes an active participant in the learning process. Positive, reward-based training is fun and will create a strong bond and lasting relationship!

For more information on signing-up for training classes please visit [pawschicago.org/events-dog-training](http://pawschicago.org/events-dog-training).