

CANINE PUNISHMENT AND POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Canine Punishment

Punishment can be verbal, postural, or physical, and it means giving your pet something unpleasant immediately after she does something you don't want her to do. Punishment should make it less likely that the behaviour will occur again and should NOT be the primary method used to train a pet! To be effective, punishment must be delivered while your pet is engaged in the undesirable behaviour—in other words, "caught in the act." If the punishment is delivered too late, even seconds later, your pet will not associate the punishment with the undesired behaviour. **Remember that you are punishing the BEHAVIOUR, not the PET.** It is also important that your pet has a means to satisfy its nature and needs. For example, your dog should be provided with appropriate exercise and appealing toys to chew on before any attempts to punish undesirable chewing are initiated.

Causing injury to an animal through discipline is an offence under the Animal Protection Act and the Criminal Code of Canada and is punishable by a maximum fine of \$20,000 dollars or 6 months jail time.

Never use physical punishment that involves some level of discomfort or even pain! Not only can this be inhumane, but it may cause your pet to bite to defend herself. Holding the neck skin and shaking your dog, or performing "alpha rolls" (forcing your dog onto her back and pinning her on the floor), are both likely to result in bites. Also, punishment might be associated with other stimuli, including people, which are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a pet that is punished for getting too close to a small child may become fearful of, or aggressive to, that child—or to other children. That's why physical punishment is not only bad for your pet; it's also bad for you and others. Punishment delivered by you may erode your dog's trust. If you're too late in administering it, punishment will seem totally unpredictable to your dog. She's likely to become fearful, distrustful, and/or aggressive, which will only lead to more behaviour problems. What we humans often interpret as "guilty" looks are actually submissive postures by our pets. Animals don't have a moral sense of right and wrong, but they are adept at associating your presence, and the presence of a mess, with punishment.

YOUR DOG	YOU
Shreds a book when you are away	Clean up the mess and make your house dog proof or use a safe dog proof area or kennel to leave your dog
Chewing on a shoe in front of you	Interrupt the behaviour with a loud noise, clap your hands or use a shaker can and then redirect your dog to an appropriate activity
Chews coffee table	Use a taste deterrent on the item so that it is unpleasant for your dog and it will be left alone

Punishment can be more effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, after your dog acts in an undesirable way, use a shake can, an air horn, or keys—but don't draw attention to the fact that the noise comes from you. If your dog perceives her "environment," instead of you, to be delivering the punishment, she'll be more likely to avoid the behaviour even when you're not around.

Positive Reinforcement – What is it?

We all like to be praised rather than punished. The same is true for your dog, and that's the theory behind positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement means giving your pet something pleasant or rewarding immediately after she does something you want her to do. Because your praise or reward makes her more likely to repeat that behaviour in the future, it is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your dog's behaviour.

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. **The reward must occur immediately—within seconds—or your pet may not associate it with the proper action.** For example, if you have your dog "sit" but reward her after she's already stood up, she'll think she's being rewarded for standing up. Consistency is

also essential. Everyone in the family should use the same commands. It might help to post these where everyone can become familiar with them. Consistency means always rewarding the desired behaviour and never rewarding undesired behaviour.

Using Positive Reinforcement

For your pet, positive reinforcement may include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. A treat should be enticing and irresistible to your pet. It should be a very small, soft piece of food, so that she will immediately gulp it down and look to you for more. Small pieces of soft commercial treats, hot dogs, cheese, or cooked chicken or beef have all proven successful. You can carry the treats in a pocket or fanny pack. Each time you use a food reward, you should couple it with a verbal reward (praise). Say something like, "Good dog," in a positive, happy tone of voice.

Some pets may not be interested in food treats. For those pets, the reward could be in the form of a toy or brief play.

When your pet is learning a new behaviour, she should be rewarded every time she does the behaviour, which means continuous reinforcement. It may be necessary to use a technique called "shaping" with your pet, which means reinforcing small steps towards a final goal. For example, if you're teaching your dog to "shake hands," you may initially reward her for lifting her paw off the ground, then for lifting it higher, then for touching your hand, then for letting you hold her paw, and finally, for actually "shaking hands" with you.

Intermittent reinforcement can be used once your pet has reliably learned the behaviour. At first, reward her with the treat three out of every four times she does the behaviour. Then, over time, reward her about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you're only rewarding her occasionally with the treat. Continue to praise her every time—although once your dog has learned the behaviour, your praise can be less effusive, such as a quiet, but positive, "Good dog." Be unpredictable with providing the reinforcement so that she doesn't catch on that she only has to respond every other time. Your pet will soon learn that if she keeps responding, eventually she'll get what she wants—your praise and an occasional treat.

By understanding reinforcement, you'll see that you're not forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies. Your dog will soon be working for your verbal praise, because she really does want to please you and knows that, occasionally, she'll get a treat, too. There are many small opportunities to reinforce her behaviour. You may have her "sit" before letting her out the door (which helps prevent dashing through doors), before petting her (which helps prevent jumping up on people), or before feeding her. Give her a pat or a "Good dog" for lying quietly by your feet, or slip a treat into a Kong®-type toy when she's chewing it instead of your shoe.

YOUR DOG	YOU
Knows "sit" but sometimes offers a paw with the "sit"	Only reinforce the "sits" where all four paws remain on the ground – end result sit without a paw lift (improving proficiency of a skill)
Learning how to rollover	Shape the behaviour by reinforcing small steps along the way. Reinforce a "down", then a "down" over on a hip, "down" on hip and head over shoulders, then reinforce the full behaviour (when teaching a new skill, different dogs will require a different number of steps to learn a new behaviour).
Offers a "sit" when she comes to you	Reinforce the "sit" so that you can maintain and encourage an existing behaviour