

Time Out

Before choosing the “time out” as your technique of choice to change unwanted behaviour it’s important to read up on the behaviour problem you’re dealing with, as there are other important aspects of each behavioural modification program that must be addressed.

The “time out” can be used to eliminate a variety of unwanted behaviours such as chewing inappropriate items, barking for attention, jumping up on people, puppy biting and other attention getting and demanding behaviours. Personally I prefer walking out on the dog for attention getting behaviours as opposed to the time out – leaving the room and closing the door behind me. It’s just as effective but doesn’t include the negativity associated with physically moving and confining the dog. Walking out can be inconvenient in a busy household and if the behaviour is severe, the time out may be more effective. If the behaviour problem is not an attention getting behaviour walking out is not an option.

The idea of the time out (or walking out on the dog) is to teach the dog that freedom ends when the unwanted behaviour occurs and freedom returns with desired behaviour. Many people attempt to stop, re-direct or punish unwanted behaviour without realizing that the attention is actually rewarding the behaviour. Many are unaware that attention is one of the most potent rewards you can give a dog so anything you do to stop the behaviour actually rewards it.

Prepare your “Time Out” Place

Blocked off Area

If you block off an area to use as your “time out” place it’s important that the dog cannot escape and that there’s nothing inappropriate in that area for the dog to chew on. In fact you’ll want to remove any beds, blankets and chew toys.

Crate

It’s important to prevent creating an unpleasant association with the crate because even if you don’t use your crate as a happy place on a regular basis chances are there will be a point in your dog’s life when it may need to be confined at home or at a vet clinic for safety or health reasons. If you use your crate as your time out place you can do the following:

1. Change the location – If you use the crate on a regular basis, move the crate to a new location when needed for a time-out. If your dog is usually crated in the living room you may wish to move it to a bedroom or kitchen for time out.

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2. Take out the good stuff – Take out the toys and blankets as the idea is not to make your dog comfortable or give it something else to do, the idea is to keep it safe only until the unwanted behaviour stops.
3. Change the top of your crate – If the top of the crate is usually covered to create a den like effect, remove the cover. If the top of the crate is usually left open cover it to create a new association.



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No Tie Downs

I prefer not to use tie downs for safety reasons as a dog can get tangled or choked by the tie down. Even if you're supervising, if your dog needs to be untangled, you'll be rewarding the current behaviour with attention.

Procedure

Put a lightweight leash on your dog during times when you feel the unwanted behaviour may occur. The moment the unwanted behaviour occurs give your dog a *no reward marker* such as "that's not it" allowing your dog the option to make a choice and choose a more acceptable behaviour. If the behaviour continues, immediately pick up the end of the leash and move your dog to its time out place. As soon as your dog is calm and quiet, it can come out again. It's important to let your dog out of its "time out" place as soon as it's calm and quiet so that it learns which behaviours earn and maintain its freedom. If you leave the dog in its "time out" place too long the association will be lost. It's crucial to ignore all barking and demands for attention while it's in its "time out" place and only pay attention to your dog and let it out when it's calm and quiet.

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The leash is important because grabbing your dog will either: reward the behaviour with attention, turn it into a chase game, cause your pup to bite the hand reaching for it or create fear and/or hand shyness. Reaching for your pup should always be a good thing – never a punishment.

Summary

Your time out place needs to be somewhere your dog can't get into any trouble. The idea is to make sure your dog is safe so you can ignore it but you also want to avoid creating an unpleasant association with your dog's necessary confinement area. Through repetition your dog will learn that the unwanted behaviour ends freedom and attention and being calm and quiet brings freedom back.

References

Dr. Ian Dunbar, Seminar notes Puppy Training 1990
International Animal Studies Behaviour Course 1994