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## Capturing Desirable Behaviors

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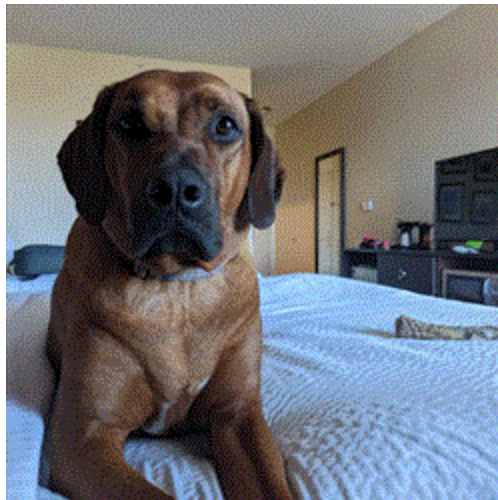


Photo Courtesy Christine Calder, DVM, DACVB (Veterinary Behaviorist)

You can improve your dog's behavior in just a few minutes daily. By focusing on the desirable behaviors your dog does naturally rather than correcting the undesirable ones, you are building a stronger relationship without force or stress. Set your dog up for success by marking for easy behaviors, not unknown complicated ones.

Choose one or two behaviors each week that you want your dog to do consistently. For busy dogs, reinforce for lying quietly on their bed. To reduce barking, reward for silence as your dog watches someone walk by your house. To stop begging at the dinner table, treat your dog for choosing to lie on a mat several feet away.



Photo Courtesy Pat Koven, LVT, KPA- CTP

Following this simple game captures the “good” behavior while ignoring the “bad”. By not prompting your dog to do a specific behavior, such as sit or down, you create a thinking dog, and as the days go by, they will start to offer only reinforced behaviors.

1. Count out the same number of dry kibble from your dog’s daily food intake. This could be 10 or 20 pieces for a small dog or 50 or more pieces for a large breed. You can withhold half from their breakfast portion and the other half from dinner or start out with the full amount to use throughout the day. High-value, low-calorie treats may be used in place of some kibble.
2. Either carry the food in your pocket or have it easily accessible in central locations.
3. Throughout the day, when your dog offers the behavior you want, encourage them by marking that moment with a clicker or a verbal word such as “yes”.
4. Give them a piece of kibble from your budgeted quantity and go about your business. By doing this, you are capturing good behavior like a snapshot. This reinforcement increases the likelihood they will repeat that behavior.
5. Spend a week working on one or two behaviors, then switch to a different one the following week. Over time, build up to more complicated ones such as rewarding your dog for bringing you a toy instead of jumping on you when you walk through the door.

After a few days, your dog will offer the desired behaviors faster than the undesired ones. You should find your dog to be calmer and your relationship stronger as you go through your kibble supply more quickly each day.

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