**Glen Mills Veterinary Hospital**

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**Social Skills for Dogs**

Teaching your dog to reliably "sit", "come" and "look" on command are very useful means of communicating with your dog, especially for dogs that have any underlying fear, anxiety, shyness or aggression. Dogs with these underlying emotions do much better in stressful situations when their owners direct their behavior. It decreases the stress of having to think of what to do when they are already concerned about their surroundings. Moreover, most dogs enjoy training. Food rewards are great and training typically strengthens the relationship between a dog and his owner.

Remember to be CONSISTENT and remember that dogs learn well, even older ones. Training does however take time and patience. Keep training sessions brief and frequent if possible. Don't be discouraged if your dog is not responding at first, which may occur, especially if the dog was use to getting attention with excited, hyper behavior. Also, remember to train in non-stressful situations. It is not fair to ask your dog to perform commands in real life situations until he is reliably acting on command every 9 out of 10 times in private training sessions. You may introduce distractions in small increments over several sessions, working your way towards real life scenarios.

Always train with **SMALL** pieces of food treats. The idea is to have the dog eat it quickly so that you can continue training. We also don't want your pet to become overweight as a product of training. And remember, you don't have to give your dog a treat every single time you train for the rest of the dog's life. It's most important in the beginning and then

praise can replace food and food can strictly be used occasionally to help reinforce the training.

Begin by using your dog's name before you use your command. This will make it clear you are talking to him specifically.

When doing positive reinforcement training, you will be rewarding your dog right after he acts correctly after a command is given. In addition, you **should** reward your dog with either a treat or praise if he does the act without the given command, however **do not** use the verbal command in this instance, because it will be confusing to the dog.

**Ready to begin? SUPER! You'll be training your dog to sit with the SIT cue.**

The first goal is to teach your dog to sit for everything. It is a simple start to successful behavioral training programs. A brief sit then becomes the dog's way to ask for something he wants. It also competes with problem behaviors; he can't jump all over people while sitting, nor can he attack or flee. It should also be easier to get and keep the attention of a sitting dog when you are trying to intervene in a situation that upsets him.

1. Begin with no distractions. Start training in a quiet learning area; not one full of other dogs, people and/or loud noises. It is ideal to start training when your dog is not highly aroused. You don't want to start him when he's at his worst.

2. Begin by addressing your dog and asking him to sit. Use a normal calm voice.

\*\* If the dog does so, reward him with a small food treat.

\*\* If you have the dog's attention but he does not comply, repeat the request.

\*\* If he does not sit, walk away. If he seeks your attention, try again. You will likely have another opportunity soon. Dogs will often seek their owner's out again shortly. Repeat the protocol.

3. Any time your dog sits on his own accord, let him know he has done something right, even if you do not have a food reward. Praise can be very rewarding for a dog.

4. A dog that has always gotten attention with boisterous behavior may at first be confused and unruly during training within this new structure. Staying calm and consistent will eventually help him change his approach to things. Avoid frequent uses of the command NO and simply keeping training as stated above.

**Now you'll be training your dog to come with the COME cue.**

1.Ask your dog to sit. Give reward. Try stepping away and then luring your dog toward you with a food reward as you use the "come" command.

\*\* If the dog does so, reward him with a small food treat.

\*\* If your dog leaves the scenario or is too distracted, walk away and try again later.

\*\* If your dog has trouble staying after the sit, thereby making it hard to call him to come, work on "Stay" first. Have him sit then take one step backwards and say stay. If he stays, reward him. Once this is accomplished, keeping trying to take more steps away using the command stay and reward each correct response. You may toss the treats towards him as you increase the distance.

**Lastly, you'll be training your dog to look at your face with the LOOK cue.**

The goal here is to get your dog's attention back on you. This is useful in the following scenarios:

\* When he is focused on something else and you'd like his attention

\* To move him past an object that frightens him

\*To focus his attention when he would otherwise be barking or reactive

1. You want to try to use this cue early on, before he is in a heightened aroused and/or aggressive state.

2. Start with food in one hand and your other hand behind your back. Ask your dog to "look" as you bring the food up to your eyes.

\*\* If your dog follows the food and looks up at you, praise him and give the food reward.

\*\* If he does not, try again. If he still does not, walk away and try again later.

3. After he has mastered the previous step, try doing the same motions except now keep the food in the down hand. Continue to lure him with your empty hand and when he is right, reward him from your other hand. Some dogs will begin to look at the hand that has the food. If this happens, do nothing. Do not interact with him at all. Let him figure it out. He will most likely stare at your hand for a few seconds and look back and forth from the hand with the food to your face. Be silent and still. When he commits to looking at your face, praise him enthusiastically and hand him 2-3 rewards.

4. After he masters the previous step, try using the cue without moving your hands. Reward the dog each time he looks at your face.

5. Lastly, after he masters all of the above; slowly increase the amount of time your dog has to look before receiving the reward, working your way up to 10 seconds. Then start trying the trick when he is turned away from you or in different scenarios, like when you two are walking together.