

TRAINING WITH REWARDS

Training with rewards is all about teaching your dog that good things happen when they make a good choice. When your dog gets a reward, they will associate this with whatever they have just done – and will be more likely to do that same thing again next time. For example, if you give a treat when your dog raises a paw, they are more likely to do this again the next time they are in the same situation!

Training with rewards is the best way to encourage your dog to behave as you would like on a day-day basis (for example learning to settle themselves down when people are busy, instead of pestering!).

- Science tells us that reward-based training is the best way for dogs to learn!
- Training with rewards is fun and helps build a positive bond between dog and owner.
- Owners that train using rewards report fewer behaviour problems in their dogs.
- Reward based training can help build confidence and encourage dogs to think for themselves.

What can I use as a reward?

Rewards can be anything that your dog likes, for example being groomed, playing in water, going off-lead during walkies, foraging for treats hidden in a cardboard box or travelling in the car! it all depends on what your dog enjoys!



All dogs are different, so they will naturally find different things rewarding, however most dogs enjoy food, toys and our attention!

Food - needs to be safe for your dog and something they like!

- ✿ Remember to cut down on the amount they get during meals if you use food for training, to prevent weight gain!



- ✿ Treats that dogs especially love (something soft and smelly like cheese, sausage or chicken) can be used as the 'gold star' reward when your dog gets something spot on! You can also use these to keep your dog's focus and attention in environments where there are more distractions. These can be chopped into small pea-sized pieces for training.
- ✿ Use treats that are less exciting (such as dry dog biscuits or chopped up veg) to reward your dog at times it is easy for them to get it right – for example when practising something they know, in quiet environments.

Toys



- ✿ Some dogs really love to play, and you can use a game with toys, such as fetch or tug, to reward them for good behaviour. Make sure you teach your dog how to release toys to you using reward-based training so that you can get the most out of your sessions.

Attention

- ✿ We often underestimate how valuable our attention is. Most dogs feel good any time we look at, touch or talk to them! This means that we are constantly influencing their behaviour with our attention. Make sure your dog gets your valuable attention for the good choices they make, rather than when they are misbehaving!



How to use rewards to train your dog

When you start training a new skill, it is important that you reward your dog every time they are successful. When they have learnt the new behaviour and can do it well in a variety of environments, the type of reward you give them can be changed – so you won't need to give them a treat for sitting for the rest of their life, you can smile and say "good dog" instead and occasionally give them a treat as a bonus!

For example, when using food to train a new behaviour it's really useful to reward every time to begin with until your dog really understands what you'd like them to do. Then once they're reliably and consistently doing it, reward them every other time, then every third time and then mix and match when you give the food reward and when you just give them some verbal praise or a fuss, so your dog doesn't know when to expect their favourite type of reward!

Work towards replacing the food reward with praise as well as using the environment to help reward your dog's behaviour so for example a reward might be going off lead, going outside, or saying hello to a friend!

These resources have been created by Dogs Trust using the most up-to-date scientific-based understanding of dog behaviour and welfare needs and can be freely downloaded by anyone interested in learning more about understanding dog behaviour and training dogs.