

Positive Reinforcement and Training Using the Clicker

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A great method to use for teaching your dog basic obedience behaviors (as well as all manner of cool tricks!) is clicker training. Clicker training follows the ideas of reinforcement theory, by means of positive reinforcement. The idea is to teach your dog to associate the “click-click” sound of a plastic box clicker, with a coming reinforcement. The reinforcement can be anything the dog likes: a food treat, a game of tug or retrieve, a nice belly rub or ear scratch, even a chance to go out to the yard, or ride in the car. Reinforcement theory states that behaviors that are reinforced are repeated, while those that receive no form of reinforcement (be it positive OR negative) fade away. The problem many people face is that through punishment, they are inadvertently reinforcing unwanted behaviors with attention, which is often the biggest reinforcement our dogs could want.

The clicker system uses no punishment, no choke, prong or electronic collars, and, instead, recommends the management of the environment and surroundings to prevent the dog from practicing the unwanted behaviors while unsupervised. It is a method that is highly enjoyable by both the dog and its owner/trainer, and that builds a wonderful bond between the two. It is great for rehabbing fearful and mistreated animals, helping them not only to learn the basic behaviors but also to gain confidence. It is an excellent method which can even be used by children, the elderly and disabled people, because it requires no force or manipulation.

So, while out walking your dog, always have the following equipment with you:

- Leash and Collar (with proper identification in case your dog gets lost)
- The Gentle Leader or Easy Walk Harness if your dog is a consummate puller.
- Your clicker (on a wrist coil, clip or lanyard for quick and easy access)
- Treat Bag full of dog appropriate food or a ball or toy that your dog will work for
- and (the thing most often forgotten!) baggies to responsibly clean up your dog's waste if he decides to stop and do its business on someone else's front lawn.

There are some wonderful books on clicker training available through our internet store at www.PuertoRicoDogs.com, as well as clickers and training aids. The books that we recommend the most for beginners are the “Getting Started Clicker Training with Your Dog Kit” which contains all the basic tools to get you going, “Click for Joy” which is in a question-and-answer/reference format and contains information on how to get started and on how to work on solving many of the most common behavior problems, and the “Click-a-Trick Flash Cards” which also include a clicker and contain easy to follow, 10-step or less instructions on teaching some of the basic obedience behaviors, as well as a few really cool tricks! Some of these titles are soon to be available in Spanish, and we are also working on bringing some DVD's and videos