

How to Set Your Dog Up for Success in Training

In training, factors such as consistency, repetition and timing are crucial to helping your dog learn what is expected of her. However, the most important gift you can give your dog-in-training is to always set her up to succeed. **In other words, give your dog a fair opportunity to make the right behavior choice.**

For example, if you call your dog to you while he's in the middle of an excellent play session at the dog park, is he going to leave that dog and come to you? Not likely. Instead, his continued play session is a reward for not coming when called and you have just taken back seat to a dog named Scruffy who he just met that day.

If the distractions in the environment around you won't allow your dog to make the behavior choice you want, don't ask it of them in that setting. Every time your dog fails to respond, your command loses effectiveness and your dog learns new ways to get out of working.

When working on newly-learned behaviors, choose training areas free of distractions until your dog really knows the behavior well. For example, asking your dog to practice "stay" in the middle of a busy park that you've never been to before might be too much if she just learned the exercise in class the week before. Instead, practice more basic exercises such as sit or down and reward them with a good play session.

Take advantage of opportunities to reward your dog. If your dog starts to run happily to you while at the dog park, call his name and praise him highly for coming to you, then release him to play. Sure, he was going to do it anyway, but that reinforcement will increase the likelihood that your dog will repeat that behavior in the dog park again. Enough repetitions of this exercise will make your dog one of the few that has a reliable recall at the dog park.

If you are working on behavior issues such as fear, low confidence or aggression, it is especially important for you to carefully evaluate any environment you expose your dog to. If you have to question your decision to take your dog into that environment, stop and decide if you are doing the right thing for your dog. Factors beyond your control, such as kids, other dogs or unpredictable traffic patterns will set your dog up for failure.

The more success your dog has in performing the behaviors you ask of him, the more rewards he will receive for those behaviors and the more likely he will be to repeat those behaviors in the future.

