



MARKER TRAINING

Marker Training has many names that it is known by. A marker is a word or sound that is associated with a reward. Food or toys can be used as rewards, but the easiest is food, so that is where training will start. Clickers are a small hand-held object that makes a distinct sound that can be used as a marker. It can be difficult to handle a clicker while paying attention to the pet and handling treats, so generally it is recommended to start with a marker word.

The first part of marker training is to choose the word to use as the marker. It should be a very short word that you do not use frequently in conversation. Examples of these words are “yes,” “mark,” “click,” or a clucking noise with your tongue. For consistency, this handout will use mark.

The first exercise in marker training is associating the mark with food. In this stage, try to get the food to your pet within two seconds of marking. At this point, avoid asking for any specific behavior. You are just trying to get the pet to realize that when he or she hears the mark, then food will shortly follow.

Training sessions should be short (less than two minutes) and the rewards should be frequent (a reward every few seconds in the beginning). If your pet loses interest, note how long training has gone on and shorten the sessions in the future. So, if your pet loses interest at 55 seconds, stop future sessions at 50 seconds. After you have been training for a number of sessions, you can gradually increase the length of time of each session. Generally, we recommend at least 2 sessions per day per person in the house and per pet. If you would like to train more frequently it is encouraged, but multiple, short training sessions are more effective for pets than a single, length session. Try to put the other animals in the house out of sight and hearing when you are working with one pet.

It is important to realize that the pet decides the reward. It is common that anxious animals will not be able to eat, so you may need a higher level of reinforcer, such as beef or cheese, or you may need to alleviate anxiety by moving away from the object of the pet's fear. In some cases where you cannot avoid the source of the dog's fear, behavioral modification medication may be necessary.

You cannot reinforce a fearful response. If the pet is responding fearfully, even with aggression, giving them food or attention will not increase the likelihood of the behavior in the future. Rather, the eventual goal is for the pet to make the connection between the stressful event and the presentation of food, therefore making the event less stressful in the long term. This is not a short process, so do not expect results quickly.

It may be helpful to have multiple treat containers throughout the house so that you do not have to plan training sessions around the location of the treats. Try to put the containers where your pets will not get into them or break them.



Treats should be very small! For large dogs, treats can be the size of your pinky fingernail. For small dogs or cats, the smallest treat you can comfortably handle is appropriate.

Continue managing the environment so that your pet does not have the opportunity to engage in undesirable behaviors. This includes locking up trash cans, picking up objects that are not toys, or putting food on the counter into cabinets.

Please give each pet in the house at least one safe area that he associates with a calm environment (see Safe Place handout). No one, humans or animals, should disturb him when he is in that location. You can give him treats or chews when he spends time in that location. Provide food, water, a comfortable bed, and plug in a pheromone diffuser in the area (such as Feliway original or Adaptil). You can also give him food toys such as Kong with cream cheese, pumpkin, baby food, or wet food to keep him occupied. Your pet should be trained to Go To this location on cue (see Go To handout). Consider videotaping him so that you can determine if he is anxious in that environment.

You may try covering the windows with window film, which can be purchased from the hardware store. Please try this when you are home since this makes some pets more agitated.

Your pet may benefit from environmental enrichment for mental and physical stimulation. This can include food toys, rawhides, training new behaviors, hiding treats for him to find, or playing fetch. If you have a dog, nose work, agility, or other classes might also provide an outlet. If your dog is unable to tolerate other dogs, he could be kept in the car when other dogs are out, or could take private lessons. If group classes are not appealing or you have a cat, there are a number of online options such as <http://domorewithyourdog.com/trickdog/> or <http://fenzidogsportsacademy.com/>.

