

How to Communicate With Dogs

Once you are able to understand how dogs learn and how to read your dog's body language, it's time to communicate with your dog. As positive trainers we focus on what we do want our dogs to do. By determining a goal behavior, we are able to hone our focus and teach one alternative behavior to the dog and avoid any undesirable behaviors.

In order to communicate with dogs, we need to be clear and concise with our signals. The key is to teach your dog what you do want and communicate this using one signal. To teach your dog a new behavior, you can employ one of two methods:

Option 1: Wait for your dog to perform the desired behavior

This method is preferred, because it teaches your dog to think through the problem. The first step is to wait for your dog to offer the behavior. Once your dog offers the behavior, let him know he's done it correctly by saying yes or clicking and then reinforce the behavior with a treat or toy.



Option 2: Lure your dog into the desired behavior

If your dog does not readily offer the desired behavior, it may be quicker to show him what you want him to do using a treat lure. Hold the treat in your hand and use it like a magnet to lure your dog from his nose into the desired position.



Communicating the behavior to your dog

Once you have taught your dog the new behavior and he is performing it reliably, it is time to name the behavior. By adding a name, or a cue, you can ask your dog to perform this behavior whenever you desire. Be sure to pick a cue that you will actually use in a real life situation and use one that is clear for your dog. To add a cue to the behavior, practice the behavior until you would bet that your dog will perform the behavior again. Then cue the behavior (either visually or verbally) just before your dog performs the behavior:

