

Guidelines for Reinforcement

Compiled by Moe Strenfel

- Toys (play) tend to activate, excite and help build speed
- Food tends to put dogs in “brain” or think mode – chewing relaxes them
 - Use food when introducing new behaviors
 - Use toys when speed is needed
- Never use a reinforcer as a bribe or lure
 - Too difficult to fade later and dog is not “aware” of what they behavior they are doing to get the reinforcer
- PLAN ahead to use reinforcers when the dog meets criteria
 - Be ready toy in hand or easy access to
 - Food in hand or easy access to
- Plan ahead what NOT to reinforce
 - Just as important as knowing WHAT to reinforce
- Reinforcers must have value for your dog in order to build behaviors
 - i.e. a dog that does not to tug can't be reinforced with a game of tugging
 - i.e. a dog that does not like liver treats can't be reinforce with a liver treat
- Reinforcers can be learned/trained
 - Teach your dog to tug or fetch in short training sessions that work on ONLY those behaviors
- Reinforcers must be under the trainer's control
 - i.e. dog that runs away to play in water is not under a trainer's control
- Reinforcers should be delivered after a verbal mark or a click
 - Don't advertise you are going to reinforce
 - i.e. leaning, moving your hand before you have marked, putting your hand in your pocket, etc.
- Reinforcers should be delivered as quickly as possible after your marker
 - Trying to deliver too early will get the dog looking AT you so they can predict when they will be reinforced
 - BE STRICT with yourself! Don't move your reinforcement hand until AFTER you have clicked or said your verbal marker
- Reinforcers should be delivered in such as way that HELPS whatever criteria you have chosen
 - To a predetermined location
- Distance/lateral work requires the reinforcer to be delivered AWAY from the handler
 - i.e. learn to throw accurately with EITHER arm
- Reinforcers in conjunction with equipment should be delivered or thrown close to obstacle