

THE CUES

Important: Remember the difference between a lure and a reward. A lure is an incentive to help your dog move in a certain way and is given immediately for the correct movement (e.g. a sit or a down). Once your dog is offering the movement reliably you can **pretend** to have a treat in your hand; show your dog he was able to do the movement without a treat. Then reach into your treat bag, pocket, wherever and produce the Reward. You need to do this as early in the training process as possible or you will end up with a “treat dependant” dog and you will find yourself chasing after your dog yelling “TREAT – Come and Get Your Treat”. Not a goal we want. ;)

SIT – Fingertips pointing up, palm towards your body. Slowly lure your dog’s nose up with a treat hidden in the fingertips of the middle finger and thumb. Nose goes up, bottom goes down – “sit!” “FREE”.

DOWN – Fingertips pointing down, palm turned away from you and pointing to the floor. Slowly lure your dog’s nose forward and down or towards paws and down. Experiment to see which way your dog responds to. Nose goes down, body will follow – “down!” “FREE”.

OFF – Don’t confuse with “down”; e.g. you walk into the room and your dog is on the couch. You tell your dog “down” (meaning “off”) and your dog looks at you and says “I am down, what’s your problem?” Lure your dog off the couch. OFF means anything under the paws should not be. Dog jumps up on you, use the “off” cue, not “down” unless you are willing to follow through and make your dog do a “down”. Do not use your hands to push your dog off of you, instead fold your hands into your body and gently lean into your dog’s space. As soon as four paws hit the floor quietly say “off”, straighten your body again to take the pressure away and quietly reward.

STAY – From a sit or a down, no treats in your hand because your dog does not need a lure at this time, but will get a reward. Hand open, palm facing dog. “Stay”. Count one, two and give your release cue – e.g. “FREE!” Remember, your dog’s stay is only as solid as your release cue. You want your dog to think “stay means stay until I hear the word “FREE”. The word “FREE” is your release word. Gradually increase the length of the stay. Train distance and duration separately. Add distractions last.

STAND – From a sit or a down, fingertips pointing to the floor, palm facing your dog. Lure your dog forward – “stand!” Tickle your dog’s tummy, play with his tail, touch his paws, look in his mouth and ears. PRAISE when your dog tolerates all this touching....make a game of it!

Training sessions are best done in short but frequent intervals. Television commercial breaks are perfect: every 20-30 minutes for 3-5 minutes at a time in the evening. Set a kitchen timer during the day or on weekends to remind yourself to practice your homework. Train during your dog’s mealtimes; use some of your dog’s meal as rewards. Monitor the calorie intake...no fat dogs at the end of six weeks!

Tips: A Sit in the kitchen is not a Sit in the living room. Dogs need help generalizing. Teach your dog **everywhere** – every room in the house, in the car, on different surfaces, in the front yard, the back yard, take your training sessions to a hardware store or the very fringe of a dog park (away from the other dogs, at first). Ask yourself “have I trained this Cue in this location?” If your answer is “no” then you may use a lure for the first couple of Cues and then change the lure to the Reward. Avoid proclaiming proudly at a friend or a relative’s that your dog can sit immediately on cue until you have “proofed” your dog in that environment. This also applies to potty training.

If your dog is not responding to a Cue he normally responds to, please remember that dogs rarely choose to be “stubborn”. Your dog may have something physically wrong, may be stressed, or maybe you have never shown him this Cue in that environment. Your dog may also be in the “train the human” mode – it is up to you to outsmart and out-train your dog! Remember, Have Fun! If you are not having fun, or you are stressed or ill, don’t train. Take a deep breath, give your dog a tickle and relax.

