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TRAINING AND BEHAVIOR

The below list is generic tips that work for many dogs. If you are experiencing any issues with your foster dog (or are confused by any of the below descriptions) please reach out to the Facebook Group and/or Gabrielle/Karen.

Training should be FUN for YOU and the dog! If you find yourself getting frustrated, its best to toss your dog a handful of treats and end the session. Working in short increments (2-5 minutes) is generally more enjoyable for your dog.

TREAT BOWLS

Capturing good decisions that the dog makes throughout the day makes training SO MUCH easier (vs. only paying attention to behaviors during formal training sessions). Having treat containers in multiple spots throughout your house, makes this easier!

Examples of 'capturing' good choices throughout the day:

1. Find your dog quietly laying in their crate without being told to go in? Toss them a treat!
2. The dog sat to get your attention instead of jumping up? Give them a treat!
3. The dog came to you instead of harassing your other pet? Give them a treat!

Aim to find at least 10 'opportunities' to give your dog a treat for good decisions (but more is always better) – this is not giving them a treat for looking cute (but that's fine too!), it's about helping the dog learn that choices – even if they aren't cued – sometimes result in good things happening!

CHARGING A MARKER (MARKER TRAINING)

Rationale: A marker (word or click) precisely signals "that was exactly what I wanted," making teaching clearer.

Steps:

1. Pick a marker word (e.g. "Yes!") or a clicker.
2. In view of the dog, say your word/click and immediately give a treat.
3. Repeat many times so the dog associates the marker with "reward is coming."
4. Ask your dog for a simple behavior they're familiar with (ie. sit) – as soon as they sit, mark (yes! Or click) and reward to further solidify the purpose of the marker word.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Always follow the marker with a treat .. like ALWAYS. FOREVER AND EVER!
- Time the marker exactly when the behavior happens.

CRATE TRAINING

Rationale: Crates keep dogs safe while they adjust to new environments. While some dogs may never fully warm up to being crated, helping your foster feel comfortable in a crate can be INCREDIBLY helpful in getting them adopted!

Steps:

1. **Introduce the crate as a neutral/positive space**
 - Place a soft bed or blanket inside, leave the door open.
 - If your dog chews up bedding in their crate, remove it.
 - Toss treats into and near the crate so the dog explores it voluntarily.
 - Mark (with your marker word or click) and reward any interest (smelling, stepping in)
2. **Reinforce entry and duration**
 - Once the dog readily enters, mark and reward inside the crate.
 - Gradually close the door for very short durations (1-2 seconds) while rewarding.
 - Gradually increase how long the door stays closed before opening and releasing.
 - Continue rewarding while the door is closed, but gradually reward less frequently
3. **Add cue words**
 - Begin saying your crate cue (e.g. "crate," "bed") just before the dog enters, then reward.
 - Introduce a "release" cue (e.g. "free," "all done") so the dog knows when it's okay to leave.
4. **Increase duration & distance**
 - Slowly lengthen how long the dog stays crated, and begin stepping away before returning to reward.
 - Intermix shorter and longer sessions so the dog doesn't always expect increasing difficulty.
5. **Generalize & maintain**
 - Use the crate for naps, quiet time, and during meals (with door open) to reinforce positive associations – don't save crating ONLY for when you leave.
 - Never use the crate as punishment.

- Respect the dog's comfort: if excessive fussing or panic occurs, back up to shorter durations.

Troubleshooting & Tips:

- If the dog panics or is very stressed to the point of destruction to the crate or themselves, reduce the time or regress to earlier steps.
- If the dog is not potty trained, make sure you are using properly sized crate (just big enough to stand, turn, lie down) — too large may encourage soiling.

LOOSE LEASH WALKING

Rationale: Makes walks enjoyable, reduces pulling, and builds impulse control.

Steps:

1. Choose a cue ("Let's go," "Walk") and a side (left or right).
2. Start training in a low-distraction area.
3. Frequently reward your dog for NOT pulling or walking at your side.
4. As soon as the dog pulls, stop walking (or gently change direction – your dog shouldn't be jerked around).
5. Wait until leash is slack; mark + reward.
6. Resume walking with the cue and reward anytime the dog is walking next you.
7. Repeat: stop or turn when pulling, reward when leash is loose.
8. Gradually add distractions, vary pace, and change terrain.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Don't jerk or yank the leash.
- Reward frequently at the start; fade slowly.
- Use a front-clip harness if pulling is strong (but still use positive methods).

POTTY TRAINING

Rationale: Essential for fostering in a home environment and helping the dog adjust to indoor living. Most adult dogs have had SOME sort of potty training, but many may need a refresher after spending time in the shelter.

Steps:

1. Establish a schedule (e.g. morning, after naps, meals, before bed).
2. Supervise indoors; tether or confine so you can monitor.
3. When you see signs (sniffing, circling), immediately bring the dog to the potty spot.
4. Wait patiently; when elimination occurs immediately say 'go potty', once they are done, immediately mark + reward (throw a party!) - ie. don't wait until they come in to give them a treat
5. If your dog enjoys time outside, this is a great time to play a bit to further solidify that pottying outside leads to fun!
6. Return indoors only after elimination.

- If your dog hasn't eliminated after 10-15 minutes (and you're fairly confident they *should* need to go) calmly walk them back in and gently lead them to their crate or other confined area. Allow them to settle for 10-20 minutes and return outside.
7. If an accident happens, interrupt gently, carry to the potty area, and reward if the dog finishes outside.
 8. Clean accident spots thoroughly to remove odor.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Never punish accidents.
- Be consistent in timing and location.
- Increase outdoor opportunities when unsure.
- Be patient — some dogs take time to adjust.
- Bring the dog out on a leash, once they potty let them explore freely as an additional reward for going potty outside
 - For dogs who are easily distracted/overwhelmed, bringing them out on a leash and standing still (ie. being really boring) can help build focus on the task at hand.

JUMPING (PREVENTION / REDIRECT)

Rationale: Keeps greetings safe and polite; helps avoid injury or damage.

Steps:

1. When greeted, turn away or step back if the dog jumps (no attention).
2. Wait until all four paws are on the ground.
3. Mark + reward the calm greeting.
4. Teach an alternate greeting behavior (e.g. sit) as a default.

Alternative

1. Keep dog on leash during meetings
2. Use leash tension to prevent jumping PAIRED with treats on the floor to support four on the floor.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Consistency is key — everyone must follow the same rules.
- Heavily reward calm behavior.

LEAVE IT

Rationale: Teaches impulse control and safety — avoiding forbidden or dangerous items.

Steps:

1. Place a treat in a closed fist; present and say "Leave it."
2. When the dog stops trying or moves back, mark + reward from the other hand.
3. Increase the wait or distance required before rewarding.
4. Progress to "leave it" with a visible treat on the floor (start by covering it).
5. Practice "leave it" throughout the day for NON-VALUABLE items

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Don't scold the dog for checking; just withhold reward until correct response.
- Start with manageable distances and temptations.
- Reinforce replacement behaviors.
- Make sure the reinforcer is higher value than the object you're asking them to leave

IMPULSE CONTROL

Rationale: Great for pushy/over-enthusiastic dogs (ie. dogs with zero chill)

It's yer choice:

Process: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBmLFn6YyoM>

1. Hold a "cookie" in your hand (if your dog is easily amped up by food, this can be a piece of kibble. If your dog is not particularly food motivated, you'll likely need something high value (hot dog, cheese, chicken, etc.)
2. Hold your hand completely still as your dog investigates your hand (it can be helpful to have it resting on your leg or other surface) – they will likely chew, paw, nuzzle etc. Your goal is to stay completely still and quiet – no cues!
3. As soon as the dog backs off of the hand, immediately open it to show them the reward (they're learning that moving AWAY from your hand is what they need to do to get access)
4. If your dog move back toward your hand (they will!), immediately close your hand to restrict access.
5. Repeat until your dog does NOT reapproach your hand when they open it. When that happens mark the moment and pick up the treat with your other hand and give it to your dog.

In the beginning: Don't make your dog wait for TOO long before rewarding .. a moment of stillness when you open your hand may be all they can handle. Slowly build up the length of time required before you give them the treat.

More on the process here: <https://dogsthat.com/tim/>

Threshold training

Rationale: Teaches a dog that their actions of consequences – wait politely, you get access to the outdoors; push through rudely, your access is restricted – also a GREAT safety tool so dogs don't bolt out of open doors/gates.

Process: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TtCE7dyNv4>

Your dog should be on leash for this exercise – this will ensure that they don't receive access to the outdoors until they have shown you the appropriate behavior.

Practice every time your dog leaves the house – whether its at the back door to go to the backyard or the front door/fence gate to go for a walk

Process:

1. With your dog at the door (they don't have to sit, but for some dogs that helps them contain their enthusiasm), reach for the handle.
 - If the dog stays put (standing or sitting), mark and reward. If your dog moves forward, gently return them to their original position and try again (you may have to only 'reach'

half way at first). Repeat until your dog is consistently 'staying put' when you reach for the door.

2. Turn the handle

- Same as step 1: If your dog stays put, mark and give your dog a cookie. If they move forwards, guide them to their original position and return to step 1 until they are consistently staying put.

3. Open the door slightly

- You know the drill! This time mark, SHUT THE DOOR, and then reward (to avoid marking and then your dog running out)

4. Gradually open the door further and further.

- If your dog moves forward, shut the door immediately (but gently .. we don't want to scare the dog with the speed of our movement) – the leash should only be a 'safety net' if your dog moves more quickly than you. We don't want to restrict movement with the leash during this exercise.
- After a few successful reps where you've opened the door enough that the dog could fit through (doesn't have to be all the way open) – release your dog (pick a cue like 'ok', 'break' or 'outside' and let them 'access' the outdoors.

5. Eventually ask for more and more time waiting at the open door before you release them.

*If you want to cue 'wait' as an indicator that 'I want you to stay at the door', that's fine. However, some trainers prefer to make this an implied behavior (ie. every doorway requires you to wait even though I don't explicitly tell you to)

Wait to Eat

This setup is very similar to threshold training and its yer choice– actions have consequence. If you wait politely, you get your food. If you are jumping and wild, you'll have to wait.

For dogs that are a) very excited about eating or b) just excited in general, you'll have to break this down into very small increments.

Phase 1: Wait with all four feet on the floor while I stand with your food bowl. Depending on the dog, this may be VERY difficult – in the beginning only ask for 1-3 seconds of stillness before offering food. Gradually build up how long they have to wait (up to 30 seconds).

Phase 2: Wait with all four feet on the floor WHILE I put your food down. Bend over slightly (as if you're going to put the food bowl down). If the dog approaches, stand back up and ask your dog to return to their original position. Repeat (perhaps bend down slightly less). If your dog stays put, give them the bowl of food. Gradually bend down further and further while your dog stays put.

Phase 3: Wait with all four feet on the floor AFTER I've put your food down. Once you can bend all the way over without your dog moving, place the food on the floor, stay bent over. Release your dog and stand up. Gradually increase the amount of time your dog must wait (with the food on the floor) before releasing them.

*For some dogs, you may be on phase 1 for multiple training sessions. That's fine! The goal is to help your dog learn some self control, without leading to excessive frustration. We want to set our dogs up to win A LOT, especially in the beginning.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRXtc2KAcO4> (While slightly different than the above description, this is a great video that includes a little bit of 'it's yer choice' – however, with adult dogs (especially big enthusiastic ones), we suggest standing for this exercise vs. sitting on the floor.)

DROP IT

Rationale: Allows you to retrieve items safely and avoid resource guarding.

Steps:

1. Offer a low-value item. After the dog holds it in their mouth, show a higher-value treat and cue "Drop it."
2. When the dog releases, mark + reward with the higher-value treat.
3. Repeat until release is prompt.
4. Gradually practice with more valuable items.
5. Use "drop it" in play and reward voluntarily giving up the object with a treat and rapidly giving back the toy.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Fetch is a great time to practice drop it. When the dog brings you the object, have a second identical object in your hand. Cue 'drop it' and when the dog drops their toy IMMEDIATELY throw the other one.
- Never forcibly pry items from the dog's mouth.
- Use treats that are more valuable than what the dog has.
- Start with low-value items; increase carefully.
- If the dog growls/guards an item, try distracting them by tossing high value treats AWAY from the item. Continue tossing treats until the dog is safely contained in a different room/crate before taking the item
 - Even if this only happens ONE TIME - contact Gabrielle/Karen for help with resource guarding.

NAME GAME

Rationale: Helps the dog learn to recognize and respond to their name, increasing attentiveness.

Steps:

1. Stand with treats. Say the dog's name clearly.
2. When the dog looks at you, mark + reward immediately.
3. Practice in different settings (indoors, outdoors), gradually increasing distractions.
4. If the dog doesn't respond, lower distraction level and rebuild.

Tips:

- Use the name only for positive events – don't use their name to get them to participate in something they might not like (ie. leaving the park, nail clipping, etc.)
- Reward heavily initially to increase value of name.

RECALL ("COME")

Rationale: Reliable recall is one of the most important cues for safety.

Steps:

1. Start in a quiet, low-distraction area (use a long line if needed).
2. Say "Come" in a happy, encouraging voice, show a treat, and back up.
3. When the dog moves toward you, mark + reward.
4. Gradually increase distance, distractions, and vary timing of the cue.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Never punish the dog upon recall.
- Use a long line early on to ensure safety and compliance
- Practice often at short distances before expecting long-range.

SIT

Rationale: A foundational behavior that supports many other cues and helps with impulse control.

Steps:

1. Hold a treat just above the dog's nose and move it up/over their head.
2. As the dog's rear lowers, mark + reward when seated.
3. Introduce the verbal cue "sit" when the behavior is consistent.
4. Fade the lure (use hand signal only), then gradually reduce treat frequency.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Don't push the dog into position; allow it to happen naturally.
- Reward quickly while learning is in progress.

DOWN

Rationale: "Down" is a calm behavior useful for settling and control.

Steps:

1. From "sit," lure the dog's nose toward the ground and forward.
2. When the dog lies down, mark + reward.
3. Add the verbal cue "down."
4. Fade the lure and reward intermittently.
5. Increase duration (delay reward while dog stays down).

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Move slowly—some dogs resist stretching out.
- Don't force the dog down; regress if needed.

TOUCH (HAND TARGET)

Rationale: Useful for guiding the dog, redirecting focus, and shaping behavior.

Steps:

1. Present an open hand near the dog's nose. Wait.
2. When the dog touches your hand, mark + reward.
3. Repeat until the dog touches reliably.
4. Add a cue (e.g. "touch").
5. Move your hand further or in different locations.
6. Use target to help teach other behaviors (e.g. guiding to "place").

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Be patient—some dogs need time to offer the behavior.
- Use high-value treats early to encourage quick learning.
- Rubbing a high value treat on your open hand can entice a nervous dog to explore

PLACE/BED

Rationale: "Place" gives the dog a designated spot (mat, bed), which helps in management and self-control.

Steps:

1. Choose a target spot (mat, bed). Lure or guide the dog to it using treats or a target.
2. When fully on it, mark + reward.
3. Add the verbal cue "place."
4. Gradually ask for the dog to stay until released ("free").
5. Over time, increase distance and duration. Use intermittent rewards.

Tips / Troubleshooting:

- Start with short stays and build slowly.
- Always release the dog before they break — avoid accidentally reinforcing leaving.
- Reward calm behavior on the place.