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TIPS FOR TRAINING

Before you start

Whether before training at home or leaving for an outing or class, have the following prepared. Consider keeping a training tote or bag by the door so everything is ready to go! Include:

- MANY, MANY soft, high-value treats cut up in very small cubes
- Bait bag or other to hold your treats
- Clicker – I will provide at first class (Smart Puppy, Obedience)
- Tug or fetch toys, stuffed Kong or bone, or other ways to occupy your dog during down time
- Mat for your dog to lie on for training breaks and for learning to settle
- Water bowl for training breaks
- Waste bags
- YOUR DOG COMES LAST – i.e., the first step in training is always preparation!
- In class, dog must be on a harness, head halter or flat buckle collar and 4-6' leash – no flexi-leads, prong, choke, or remote collars. If that creates a concern, feel free to contact me to discuss
- Give your dog a chance to check out a new environment before asking for more than foundation behaviors like not pulling or barking – dogs need time to sniff, understand they are safe when they first arrive anywhere

Know your dog

Spend time just observing your dog. Make a mental note of what he or she looks like when happy, excited, calm, anxious, and frightened – and everything in between! Check out the Dog Decoder app for cell phones.

When evaluating your dog's emotional state, look at:

- Head carriage
- Ear position
- Mouth position
- Back carriage
- Tail carriage
- Tail motion
- Overall expression – comes from eye shape & dilation, eyebrow position, whether lips and facial muscles are tense or relaxed
- Dog's body position in relation to you and to objects or people around you – turned sideways or facing straight on? Looking directly at, looking at sideways, or completely turned away?
 - Most canine communication is expressed through body position and motion, NOT vocalization
 - A dog consistently keeping his head or whole body turned sideways or away from you may be distressed. Take time to determine what the issue is and whether it's the training session or something else. Consider postponing the session (see below).

At home fun

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Training should be fun! Make a fun game of things like Find It, Wait, and Come – let your dog know when you're happy they are getting it right! This will increase your dog's interest and attention on you and strengthen your relationship. Tips:

- Before training, make sure your dog has relieved himself and had a chance to burn off initial energy, get some water
- Train when your dog is hungry (or at least not right after meals)
- Train when your dog seeks you out – looks at you imploringly or otherwise tries to engage you
- If your dog brings over a toy to engage you, use play as the reinforcement for a desired behavior
- If it is safe/okay to do so, use gaining access to what your dog wants as reinforcement.
Example: you enjoy having your dog in your lap, and your dog is looking to jump up into your lap. Ask for a sit, or paw, then praise and invite her up when she does it.
- Keep planned training sessions short: a few repetitions or up to a few minutes is plenty, in many cases
- Outside of planned training, capture behaviors you like whenever you see them, even if it's just with a quick acknowledgement and smile

Remember:

Only train when both you and your dog are ready for some fun!

- Dogs can't learn if they are anxious or frightened and don't learn very well when they are tired or stressed (nor can we teach very well when we are in that condition)
- When you do train, if at any time either of you is not enjoying the training "game", end on a positive note and leave it for another time
- NEVER use her name for anything she might perceive as less than wonderful - just go get her or interrupt what she is doing with some other noise ("hey", "enough", "knock it off", "no")
- In all exercises, increase difficulty in very small increments. The slower you go at first, the stronger the behavior will be in the end.

Manage To Prevent:

Management is a big part of effective training. Do your best not to give your dog the opportunity to practice undesired behaviors while you are teaching alternatives. Put gates around, or a brick on, exposed trash cans; pull shades or otherwise use visual blocks for barking/overstimulation; shorten the leash and increase distance from triggers when out and about if you see your dog is having difficulty.