We'll do our best to help you integrate your dog into your family, if you're willing to work with us and your dog, using force-free, reward-based, and low stress handling techniques and training.

cheerfuldogs chronicles

cheerful dogs, happy people   Issue 17

A World of Dogs: How Dogs Learn

Dogs learn in two ways: by association (emotional response) and by consequence (doing things). An example of associative learning is the reaction of dogs to the sight of a food bowl: fits of joy. They have learned that this bowl predicts mealtime. We can use dogs' associations to teach them things. For instance, new puppies don't care about leashes. But clip on the leash and take a puppy for a walk. Soon she figures out the leash means fun and, bingo. Puppy loves leashes. The reverse is also true. You can teach a dog to hate or fear leashes by repeatedly using them to give corrections or tie her up outside on her own. *What does this mean?* Everything you do around your dog influences the associations she makes.

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As for learning by consequence, imagine teaching your dog to sit. The dog sits nicely. Then you rummage around for the treat. When you deliver the treat five seconds later, the impact is lost, because your dog has sniffed the ground and looked left. As far as your dog knows, she got the treat for looking left. You may eventually teach your dog to sit, or you might end up with a dog that sits and looks left. *What does this mean?* That we need precision and immediacy to effectively train dogs.

....how dogs learn

Because of how dogs learn, they see the world in two ways: safe/good-for-me vs. dangerous/bad, and what works vs. what doesn't. The safe vs. dangerous outlook comes from learning by association. When dogs are punished for peeing on the carpet, they don't learn inside/outside — they learn that it isn't safe to pee in front of you. The works vs. doesn't work outlook on life comes from learning by consequence. All dogs try staring at the refrigerator to get it to open and give up when it doesn't work. They also try staring at people at the dinner table — and because it works once in a while, they keep doing it. Dogs do what is safe and what works. Be patient with your dog and careful about what you pay attention to and what you ignore, and you will soon have a relaxed, happy, and well-trained four-legged friend.

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Did You Know:
These doggie proverbs?

1. A dog with two tails (an overjoyed person)
2. Every dog has his day (even the lowest among us gets a moment of glory)
3. A dog's chance (no chance at all)
4. Three-dog night (a night so cold that two dogs in the bed is not enough)
5. Hair of the dog (a supposed hangover cure: another drink of what got you in trouble in the first place)
6. To see a man about a dog (all-purpose excuse to leave a room)
7. Let sleeping dogs lie (don't add cinders to a potentially explosive situation)
8. A dog's breakfast (an awful mess)

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