



LEARN TO EARN

This is an important part of any training or behaviour modification programme, as it helps to provide a good base for all other training that will follow.

Using this method means that you can be in control of your dog without using any force or punishment. It is not a training principle based on out dated dominance theory. In fact the aim of the exercise is to enhance the relationship that you have with your dog because:

- 🐾 They learn to look to you for commands which gives them support and direction.
- 🐾 It promotes their confidence in you, knowing that you are taking care of things.
- 🐾 It helps to control a reactive dog by enabling them to focus on you to help and guide them
- 🐾 It reduces frustration which is often at the root of aggressive behaviours

In order to achieve the above, you need to be in control of all the things that are important to your dog, such as food, toys and your attention.

The important thing is that your dog does something for you before you do something for him or her. Think of it a bit like you asking for a "please" before they get something they desire.

Food

It is important to remember that all of your dog's food actually belongs to you. So, it is important that you control when and where your dog receives food.

As mentioned, it's a similar principle to teaching a "please" before they get something they want and value. The way that you can achieve this is to ask your dog to "sit", "down", "stay", "rollover" or any other simple command that he or she already knows before he or she receives food or treats.

Toys

As with food, remember that all of your dog's toys also belong to you. It can be a good idea to keep all of your dog's toys in a 'toy box' or cupboard, so that you have control over them.

You can select toys to give to your dog when you want to, and put them away again when you want to. Remember to ask for a simple command before they are given.

You may find that your dog will actually become more enthusiastic about the toys when you do this. That means that they act as a greater reward, which can be important when training.

Your Attention

This is the resource that people find the most difficult to remember to control, and it is often the resource that your dog wants most. Dogs are social animals, and your attention is very important to them. It is important to remember that your attention, like food and toys, belongs to you. It should be you who decides when to give it and when to take it away.

This does not mean that you have to restrict or reduce the amount of attention that you give to



your dog, it just means that you give it on your terms – you start and finish every interaction.

If your dog has been used to receiving attention from you whenever he or she asked for it or if they have a tendency to seek your attention it is important to teach them an "end of interaction signal". I call this the Ah Ah signal.

As with the food and toys, it is a good idea to ask your dog to say "please" for your attention.

Rules of learn to earn

1. Toys and food belong to you, so ensure that you are in control of both of these resources.
2. Your dog should understand the Ah Ah command especially if they are easily frustrated or regularly seek your attention
3. Your dog has to say "please" in some way before they receive any of their resources, be it food, toys or your attention.
4. People start all interactions.
5. People finish all interactions.
6. All attempts by your dog to start interactions, or to prolong them must be ignored.

Do be aware of inadvertently teaching your dog to use old strategies.

For example:

1. Your dog barks at you to play or take him/her out
2. You ask for a command as per the learn to earn
3. Dog responds
4. You let the dog out or play

That only teaches your dog to go through that ritual and doesn't address the problem – they still bark!

Instead wait for your dog to stop barking or use 'Ah Ah' (refer to handout)

When they have stopped barking, then ask for the command.

You can then chose to respond with play or simply praise them for carrying out your command.

"Learn to earn" is an essential part of any behaviour modification programme(BMP), particularly where a dog is controlling situations or displaying attention-seeking behaviours. It is therefore, vital that you understand the principles of the programme in order to improve the behaviour of your dog. If you need more help implementing this in to a BMP contact me.



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