

AKC Canine Clubs-Community Dogs: Week 4

Human Body Language

- Skills Practice. (5 min)
- Introduction of new concepts. (20 min)
 - Write the key words on the board.
 - Anticipation.

Anticipation is key in dog training. You want to be one step ahead of your dog. I firmly believe prevention is much more effective than correction. What I mean by that is it's better to intervene and redirect with a good behavior before a bad behavior can even happen, rather than telling the dog he is wrong after he has done something bad. There's a saying that if a behavior happens three times, then it has become a habit. Bad behaviors are much harder to break after they have become a habit. An example of prevention would be when I'm walking my dog and I see another dog approaching. Naturally, my dog will want to pull towards the other dog to say hello. Instead of waiting for my dog to spot the dog and start pulling, as soon as I see the other dog, I get my dog's attention and ask him to sit and stay while the other dog approaches. If he remains under control, then I can allow him to greet the other dog if the other dog appears friendly and the owner says it's okay to greet. You might say, "I don't know what my dog is thinking, how do I know what my dog is going to do before he does it?" As we've been learning, dogs tell us everything we need to know with their body language. When their ears perk up and they start staring at something, we know they are interested in something. Read your dog's body language and anticipate what he is thinking.

- Use of your voice.

We already talked about tone, but now we are going to discuss talking to your dog in general. Do you think dogs are better at interpreting your body language or your words? (Ask students to answer.) While they can listen to both body cues and your voice, dogs don't speak English. They are much more attuned to your body than your words. As a result, we want to minimize the use of your language. You don't want to repeat a command over and over again. If I keep talking to you all the time, nagging you, "sit, sit, I said sit! What are you doing? Come over here. Pay attention." Pretty soon you're going to tune me out. No one wants to listen to that. This is especially important when you are using a dog's name. Only use the dog's name when you want to get his attention. If you use his name all the time, he will learn to ignore it. Use your voice sparingly and purposefully. If you repeat a command over and over again, the command becomes less effective. Dogs can also learn to associate the repetition as the command. Instead of thinking "sit" means to sit, they think "sit, sit, sit" means to sit. It's important to be clear and consistent.

➤ Patience.

Instead of repeating commands, practice patience. Ask your dog for a command and wait a few seconds for him to figure out what you want. Just like I would want someone to give me time to figure out a problem, give your dog time to problem solve. If you know your dog has heard your command and you've given him a few seconds to figure it out, then you can ask him for the command again. However, before you ask him again, think about why he didn't listen to you the first time. Did you have his/her attention? Was he/she distracted? Was your verbal command and visual cue clear? Think about what you can do to make your dog successful the next time you ask him for a skill.

➤ Making decisions.

We talked about anticipation already. When you are giving a command, especially when you are in training, you want to be pretty certain the dog will perform the command. For example, if my dog is staring at another dog and not paying attention to me, I'm not going to ask him/her to "sit" right then. If I do, he probably won't do what I ask and he will actually be practicing ignoring my command. Instead, I will get my dog's attention by moving away or getting his attention with a treat or a sound. Then when he looks at me I can ask for a command. Set your dog up for success.

➤ Bridge Words.

When we are playing sports or doing school work, people will often cheer us on. "Good job, you're almost there. That's it, just a little longer." We want our dogs to know they're on the right track, too. We call these bridge words. A bridge word that the dog (we are using) knows is "good." You want to say this word in a low, drawn out tone (demonstrate). If we say "good" in a high pitched voice, we will get the dog excited. If we have our dog in a stay, we do not want to get him/her excited, because then he/she might break from his stay. A bridge word is a calming praise while the dog is performing a task.

- Body block.

The body block is a good tool to use when your dog is distracted. By placing yourself in front of the dog and between the dog and a distracting item, you can disrupt the dog's attention and focus his attention back on you. Demonstrate and let students demonstrate in the walking without pulling exercise.

- Present students with video examples of different scenarios where a dog is not succeeding. Ask students what the trainer could do to set the dog up for success.
- Dogs are so attuned at reading our body language that it is your job to get your dog to pay attention to you. If your dog is not listening to you, change your approach. No one can be 100% successful with their dog, but we learn from our mistakes. When something isn't working, it is a valuable opportunity for us to reevaluate our actions. Double check your stress level and your attitude. Think about your body language. What are you trying to tell the dog? What are you actually communicating to the dog?

- These are a few tools you can use when trying to get your dog's attention.
 - Tension on the leash.
You want your dog to be working with you because he/she wants to, not because you are controlling him/her with the leash. You are a team. Trust goes both ways. They do not need to look at you to sense what you want from them. We also discussed before a trainer's mood when training. If the leash is taught, there is probably some kind of stress or distraction going on with that trainer. Do your best to keep the leash loose and keep the dog's attention so he/she doesn't even reach the end of the leash. This ties in with what we talked about with anticipation.
- Walking without pulling. (20 min)
Students get a chance to practice walking the dog around the classroom. To be successful, they must use what they learned in this class and previous classes.
 - Walking without pulling is important for any dog, especially a service dog. In all environments they must learn to stay in control of their behavior and walk nicely beside their handler. You will be using what we discussed in this class to help you succeed while walking your dog around the room. (Reference the key words on the board.) Make sure you are praising your dog along the way to let him know when he is doing a good job.
 - Demonstrate, then students will take turns practicing walking around the room.
- If there is time, have students do a walking with distractions exercise. A student gets to practice walking without pulling, but this time, other students are serving as distractions in the classroom while the trainer and dog team walk around the room. The student trainer has to anticipate the distractions and do their best to work with the dog.
 - Take-Home Sheet