

TRAINING YOUR ENGLISH SHEPHERD

by Connie DeBusscher

Farmers have been training their English Shepherds and their ancestors for centuries. Intelligence and trainability were a few of the traits farmers selected for in a good working dog. These dogs needed to have natural instincts to circle or control livestock, but also needed to respond to the farmers directions as well. This took training, once these dogs understood what the job was they quickly learned the routine and could perform the job with little or no direction from his master.

Training techniques have changed in the last decade; we have a better understanding of how dogs learn. In the 1930's behavioral scientist B.F Skinner defined the principles now known as "operant conditioning", called this because the dog can operate or manipulate his environment by his behavior. They can make things happen, either good or bad, by choosing behaviors that are rewarded or punished.

The following are words behaviorist use to describe the principles of operant conditioning;

Punishment—reduces the likelihood of a behavior being repeated.

Reinforcement—something that increases the likelihood of a behavior being repeated.

Positive—adding something desirable like a toy or a treat or undesirable such as a verbal correction.

Negative—taking something away (whether that "something" is desirable or undesirable).

When these terms are put together we get the

four principles of operant conditioning.

Positive punishment—the dogs behavior makes something undesirable happen.

Example: The puppy chews on a shoe, the owner yells at him and throws him outside. Throwing the pup outside might reduce the likelihood of the puppy chewing on the shoe in front of the owner the next time. But it won't necessarily reduce the likelihood of the puppy chewing items in the house.

Positive reinforcement—the dogs behavior makes something desirable happen.

Example: The puppy goes outside to his designated potty area and does his business, so the owner says "good puppy" or "yes" in a happy tone and feeds the puppy a treat. Giving the pup a treat will increase the likelihood of the puppy doing his business in his potty area.

Negative punishment—the dogs behavior makes something desirable go away.

Example: The dog jumps up and puts his feet on his owner, the owner turns his back on the dog and looks away. The dog is less likely to keep jumping up if the behavior makes the owner's attention go away.

Negative reinforcement—the dogs behavior makes something undesirable go away.

Example: The dog continues to bark, so the

owner shakes an empty pop can with pennies in it (this makes a loud sound) when the dog barks. The dog stops barking the loud sound stops. The owner praises and rewards the dog for being quiet.

This type of training opens the door to your dog's mind. It gives you and your dog the keys to understanding each other. By receiving rewards for desired behaviors, your dog learns how to choose to do the right thing, rather than just how to avoid doing the wrong thing. As you train your dog, you create a relationship based

on trust and understanding. You will soon find that your dog can learn at the speed of light, and, if you choose to teach him, you will realize that he is capable of performing incredible complex behaviors.

Learning how to communicate with your dog can be a joyful and awe-inspiring experience of mutual empowerment.

In the next issue, teaching your dog basic commands.

Connie DeBusschere, has been working with dogs for nearly 30 years. She has attended the Association of Pet Dog Trainers 2004 annual conference, Oregon State University's animal science, canine behavior seminars in 2005 & 2006. She has been a professional trainer for 7 years and continues to study dog behavior and current training methods. Helping people have the best relationship possible with their canine friends.



English Shepherd, Tibo, demonstrates a good recall, with positive reinforcement, a treat.

Nixon's Tibo