

## **Clicker Training with Puppies**

Bringing home a new puppy is an exciting time and you want everything to be just right. One of the most important aspects of getting off on the right paw with your new companion is training. Puppies are extremely impressionable, especially at the age of eight to twenty weeks, a time commonly referred to as the imprinting stage. It is during this time that good habits can be developed and bad ones can be avoided through positive, motivational training. One of the best ways to have fun training your puppy and see fast results is through clicker training.

So what is clicker training and how does it work? Clicker training utilizes a combination of the scientific principles of classical conditioning from Ivan Pavlov and operant conditioning from B.F. Skinner. (Pavlov's dogs salivated at the sound of a bell and Skinner trained pigeons to perform series of movements in order to receive their food reward.) Clicker training teaches your dog to associate an auditory signal, like the clicker, with a pleasurable reward, like food. Through repetition, your dog learns that the clicker means that what he did at that moment and a reward is to come. The clicker is an effective tool because the sound is clear and consistent, and it helps bridge the time between when you mark the correct behavior to when the reward is given. Because it is a reward-based method, the clicker can help your puppy become an active learner. The Pro-Training Clicker features a free starter guide in packaging, as well as a free expanded guide online at [www.starmarkacademy.com](http://www.starmarkacademy.com).

Other aspects essential to training your puppy are timing and motivation. Timing is important because dogs live in the present and there exists a window of only a second for your puppy to associate a cause with an effect. This means your reward for a job well done must be immediate for your puppy to make an accurate association with his action and the reward. Any lag in your communication can result in confusion for your puppy, or inadvertently teaching him something unexpected. The clicker can actually help you mark the exact moment your puppy performs the correct behavior without a lag in communication time. Motivation is finding something very appealing to your puppy that he wants to work for. Oftentimes food rewards are used in training because dogs have an

inborn willingness to work for it, but you can also use praise, petting, or a special toy reserved just for your training sessions.

Remember that being patient and having fun are especially important when training your puppy. Training sessions should be kept short (about 15 minutes per session) and upbeat to prevent your puppy from getting bored. Praise and reward your puppy often when he performs an exercise well so he remains motivated in your sessions. Choose quiet locations free from distraction in which to hold your training sessions so your puppy can focus his full attention on you. Don't push too hard and only move onto more difficult exercises when you feel your puppy is ready. Along with basic obedience exercises, like sit, down, and walking on a loose leash, you can also begin teaching your puppy how you would like him to behave as an adult. These exercises can include sitting to greet people instead of jumping up on them, staying off the furniture, and anything else you can think of.

Participating in group classes led by a professional trainer is a great way to teach your puppy essential obedience exercises. One benefit of group classes is having the input of a trainer to guide you in the right direction for training your puppy, as well as help with any problems or questions you may have. Your puppy will also benefit by being able to socialize with other dogs and people, as well as learn to pay attention to you in an environment with distractions. Look for a group class in your area geared towards the specific training needs of puppies and offers positive motivation techniques like clicker training.

It's the first few months with your new puppy that create are a great opportunity to build the foundation of a lasting bond with your dog. The training you do now will help guide your puppy in the direction of a well-mannered canine companion for life.

### **Trainer Developed: Academy Tested**

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