

General Training Tips

By Anne Copeland

Unless the dog you are fostering or adopting is a slightly older, owner turn-in, there is a good chance that the dog does not know the most basic doggy household behavior. You will have the advantage of not having to break old training habits, but you will most likely have the disadvantage of having a dog that has not yet learned how to learn. While the most modern training methods promote positive reinforcement training using treats, toys, and praise, you may be working with a dog that is still too nervous and anxious to play or even eat near you. Positive methods are even more critical with these dogs, as they must learn that responding to you will give them a pleasurable experience. In the very beginning you might even find that the most reinforcing treat for the dog you are training is for you to leave the vicinity or move further away from the dog.

Most people find that teaching the dog to sit on command is about the easiest default behavior to teach the dog, since virtually every dog will sit on its own sometime during the day. All you have to do at first is simply reward the dog each time they do it, even if you haven't said "sit." If the treat, toy, etc., is something the dog craves, they will soon be sitting nearly every time they see you and you can now start saying "sit" as you see them begin to park their bottom.



We won't go into the suggested methods to teach all the other household commands such as down, stay, wait, leave it, but it is beneficial to both the family and the dog to gently begin to teach the dog these things, as they make life much more pleasant and help the dog learn to learn. However, it is very important for the dog to learn a command such as "wait" when you don't want it to move from the general area. This is especially important around open doors that do not lead to fenced areas. A frightened dog suddenly loose in the open is in danger and is not likely to allow strangers (which in the beginning includes you) to approach it. So, any time you don't want a dog to go through a door or walkway or anywhere else, use a "body block", which means put yourself between the dog and the location it is trying to reach. If you can manage to also move into the dog's space while you are blocking him/her, the dog is likely to back up to maintain whatever is a comfortable distance. While blocking, if the dog stops moving, say "Wait" and give a reward!

If your new dog is really frightened of new people or situations, you will have to begin socializing it slowly. Never force a dog to accept something that it fears. If the broom sends the dog running into a crate or behind the furniture, do not keep bringing the feared object closer to it, a technique known as "flooding". Take that object and put it in sight, but far away from the dog so that it eventually becomes another piece of furniture and less scary. Imagine how you would feel if you feared spiders or snakes and someone wanted to help you

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overcome your fear by bringing the spider or snake closer and closer to you telling you “See how harmless it is, it won’t hurt you!” I doubt you’d get over your fear very quickly. But if the feared object is where it can be seen, yet not in your fear zone, eventually you will get used to it being around and won’t panic at just the sight of it.



If the dog is fairly accepting of strangers being nearby, you should probably enroll it in a puppy or socialization class with someone who uses positive training. There are several trainers who have volunteered to allow our foster dogs to attend their socialization or puppy classes without charge. If you are interested, contact www.gccavalierrescue.org.

We don’t recommend using chain/choke collars on our Cavaliers. In fact, it will probably take a little while for your new dog to get used to wearing a plain buckle collar or harness. When it is first put on, the dog will probably scratch at it, rub on the floor trying to get it off, or even just freeze in place, afraid to move. Praise and reward the dog as soon as it stops that kind of behavior and ignores the collar. If at all possible, don’t try putting a leash on the dog and walking it until the dog is used to the collar or harness.

If you are in a position where you must take the dog out on a leash to potty, and if the dog refuses to walk on the leash, carry it to whatever spot you want it to use as a toilet, put it down and try to keep the leash slack so there is no pressure on the neck from the attached collar or harness. Do not try to drag the dog around with the leash; that will only frighten it even more. Most of these dogs have never even seen a collar and leash, let alone worn one. To help the dog get used to the leash, you might want to leave it on in the house and let the dog drag it around while you watch. That way the dog won’t get caught on anything, or hurt or more frightened.



If you have made some progress with your foster or adoptee and want to continue with training, some of the proponents of positive motivation training that you can look up on the internet are:

Ian Dunbar

http://www.siriuspup.com/about_founder.html

<http://www.dogstardaily.com/>

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Victoria Stillwell

<http://animal.discovery.com/convergence/its-me-or-the-dog/bio/bio.html>

Karen Pryor

<http://www.karenpryoracademy.com/>

<http://www.clickertraining.com/>

Susan Clothier (super knowledge of fearful dogs)

<http://www.flyingdogpress.com/>

There are many other good trainers, but those listed above are some of the first to develop and use reward-based methods as opposed to punishment. Their methods are very forgiving of the novice trainer and have stood the test of time. Remember, Cavaliers instinctively want to please, so show them lots of love and patience, and proceed at their pace. The results will reward both of you!