

Teaching a Hand Target

Activity 2.2

In this activity you will teach your dog to target the palm of your hand with his nose. Hand targeting is a very versatile foundation behavior that will help you train other behaviors later on in the course. Most dogs quickly learn to love hand targeting, since it is easy to learn and easy to maintain a high rate of reinforcement.

You'll need

Clicker
Treats
Treat bag
Your dog

Setup

For this exercise, since you'll be using one of your hands as a target, you'll need to decide whether you'll click with your target hand or the same hand that delivers treats. So practice without the dog and see which is more comfortable for you. Remember your clicker mechanics: clicking and treating need to be two separate, distinct actions.

You may find that you need to do a few training sessions to complete all the steps in this activity. With each new session, do a quick warm-up of the early steps of this activity before moving to the more advanced steps. If, at any time, your dog's progress stops, go back to the last point where he was successful and build again from there.

Steps

1. Get ready

In this exercise, as with the mat one, your dog is likely to touch or sniff your hand almost immediately, so be sure your clicker and treats are ready so you can click that very first contact.

2. Present your hand, click

Begin by presenting your hand right in front of the dog's nose, just an inch or so away. The instant your dog touches or sniffs your hand, click and treat. Repeat this

step several times, removing and then presenting your hand again after each repetition.

3. Present your hand to the side

When your dog is reliably touching your hand when presenting an inch or so in front of his nose, begin to present your hand to the left or right, still just an inch or so away from the nose. Repeat this step several times.

4. Move a little farther away

Present your hand a little farther away, just a few inches at first, so the dog must move to reach it.

5. Add upward and downward

Raise your criteria so that the dog must move his head up and down in order to touch your hand.

6. Add following your hand

Raise your criteria so that the dog must take a few steps in order to touch your hand.

7. Add distance

Raise your criteria so that the dog must follow your hand for a greater distance.

8. End with something fun

End the training session by doing something else your dog enjoys, like playing fetch, tug, or giving him a belly rub.