

Protocol for Training Dogs in the Shelter

All dogs need some amount of training and shelter dogs are no exception. Training the shelter dogs not only makes them more adoptable but also provides them with socialization with humans and mental stimulation.

Positive reinforcement methods will be used to train the shelter dogs. This involves rewarding the behavior you want and preventing or ignoring the behaviors you don't.

It is not acceptable to use physical punishment of any kind on a shelter dog. The dogs are under enough stress in this environment and the addition of negative experiences with their caretakers will increase the stress.

Methods

There are several methods of positive reinforcement training that are acceptable for the shelter dogs. Lure/reward training and clicker training are preferred.

Lure/reward training involves using a food lure to help the dog move into a desired position (such as a sit). Once the dog has moved into the position, the reward is given. A verbal cue should be added to the behavior.

Clicker training involves using a sound (the click of the clicker or a word like "click") to "mark" the desired behavior as a rewardable behavior. While you can do some Pavlovian conditioning first – pairing the sound of the marker signal with the treat – this is not always necessary because the dog will learn this quickly after he/she hears the click and immediately receives a treat a few times. Very quickly the dog learns "what I did when I heard the click earned a reward". Marker-based training is very effective because the dog learns exactly which behavior earns a reward and rewarded behavior will always be repeated. A verbal cue should be added to the behavior once the dog has been reinforced for the behavior a handful of times. When you first start to add the verbal cue you say it AS the dog is doing the behavior. For example – AS the dog is sitting you say "sit". Pair the word "sit" with the action of sitting and the dog will soon learn that the word "sit" refers to that action.

Training Sessions

Training sessions should be short (no more than 5 minutes at a time) but can be repeated several times throughout the day. Training should also be incorporated into all walks (i.e. asking the dog to sit before opening the cage door).

Tools:

Flat buckle collars, martingale collars, head halters, and body harnesses are appropriate gear for walking shelter dogs.

Choke collars, pinch collars, and shock collars will not be used on any shelter dog.