

TIPS FOR TRAINING

Conquering your dog's aversions is as easy as Pavlov

Like most dogs several events can predict happy excited behavior? That **YIPPIE** response whenever you pull out the food bowl, whip out their favorite toy, or the excited anticipation of a walk when the leash appears. Knowing these events will be instrumental in conquering your dog's aversions. Aversions to such things as, toenail trimming, touching sensitive areas, grooming, ear drops, trips to the vet or anything else your dog may find icky can be turned into a pleasant event.

Thank you, Pavlov

Thanks to the work by the late scientist Ivan Pavlov, we can prevent aversions from forming, or eliminate the ones that already exist. Pavlov discovered that two events linked together create a predictable response, termed conditioned response. The two events that were linked included a bell and food, the conditioned response was saliva. Similarly, one could experiment using humans by linking a bell with biting into a lemon. With every random ring of the bell the subject would be instructed to bite into a lemon. Following a few trials of this sequence and **voila** you have the conditioned response of puckering.

Dogs know

Linkages are occurring all the time for dogs. Doorbell ringing, putting shoes on, opening the refrigerator, the crinkling of a bag are all examples of events that have most likely produced a conditioned response in your dog. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how to use this theory to erase an aversion and turn it into something desired.

Changing the association

The trick to changing any aversive association is to present the icky event first, followed by what your dog loves. Before putting that food bowl down present the toenail clippers, followed by the anticipated event of the food bowl. With each sequence you are linking toenail clippers with meal time, (translation, dog loves toenail clippers) now link a couple strokes of the brush with a round of fetch or tug? A bath can be followed with a leash walk, being picked up or touched in sensitive areas can be followed by ear or butt scratches. The more opportunities which produce those "jump for joy" moments, the more opportunities you have for changing previously bad associations to something wonderful!

Too much too fast

When using this theory to eliminate aversions, always pay close attention so as not to frighten Fido with too much too fast. Adding steps only when he is doing well and clearly anticipating good stuff when an aversion is presented. When too much pressure is applied you risk the possibility of your dog shutting down and progress coming to a halt. If your dog is shying away or is clearly distressed when presenting the aversion take a break and re-evaluate. More than likely you are moving through the steps too quickly.