

Teaching A Dog To Target Your Hand

Teaching a dog (or cat) to target is a great way to increase confidence in a shy animal and some self control in a mouthy dog. It helps the pet learn that approaching people is a wonderful and rewarding thing to do. It can be used to calmly redirect your dog's attention when needed and can serve as a way to get your pet to come. Ultimately, it can even be used to teach a variety of different tricks.

Most animals are naturally curious and will readily investigate an outstretched hand, providing an easy starting point for teaching this behavior.

STEP 1



In a quiet place, when the pet is calm and rested, slowly present your palm (index finger for cats) perpendicular to the ground and approximately 6 inches away from the pet.

The pet should approach without hesitation because they are curious and sniffing your hand. The moment they make gentle contact, use a verbal marker or clicker and give them a treat. Deliver the treat from the opposite hand that you're using as a target. Deliver the treat as you remove your hand/finger from their vision by placing your hand behind your back. Continue to build on this behavior by doing multiple repetitions and rewarding every time the animal makes contact.

Sequence of Step 1 events

- Present hand/finger
- Animal gently touches hand/finger
- Mark and treat as you place hand/finger behind your back

Tip: Not all animals will be curious to approach your hand. These animals can begin by getting a reward for simply looking at your hand gesture.

STEP 2



Part 1- Distance: Once the animal is making contact with your hand/finger 90% of the time you can begin creating a small amount of distance in the following order, making sure you are getting a positive emotional response before progressing to the next distance.

6 inches; 8 inches; 10 inches; 1 foot, 1.5 feet; 2 feet; 2.5 feet; 3 feet

Tip: If the pet is not successful after introducing a new distance, return to offering your hand/finger at the distance the animal was successful 90% of the time. Work at that distance until you are back to 90% success and make the increase smaller. (If you added 2 inches of distance, try only adding one inch.)

Part 2- Hand Position: Once they are successfully targeting your hand/finger with increased distance, return back to a 6 inch distance and start presenting your hand in different places. The gesture of your hand will soon become a cue for the animal to approach, thus creating a positive association.

Tip: Do not increase distance and change your hand position at the same time. If you change your hand position, do so at a distance they are already successfully targeting.

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STEP 3 (for dogs)



Begin in a slightly more distracting environment and return to presenting your hand approximately 6 inches away from the pet. Continue to proceed with Level 1 & Level 2 in the new environment.

Making your hand gesture slightly more obvious can also help the animal generalize in a new environment.

Tip: If the animal is not offering the behavior in the environment you have chosen, find a less distracting area, offer your hand closer than 6 inches, or return to a familiar environment.

STEP 4 (for dogs)



When your dog is consistently coming to a hand target, you can begin introducing the hand with another handler present. While sitting or kneeling close to one another, both handlers will take turns offering the hand target gesture.

Tip: Make sure to reward after every repetition!

REMINDERS:

- Make sure to not push towards the animal's face with your hand. Instead keep your hand still and allow them to approach.
- Keep in mind that different areas will be more or less distracting depending on the individual animal.

