

## MAXIMIZING TREATMENT SUCCESS

### Rewards

Identify very valuable rewards for the pet that you are training; for most dogs this will be delectable food treats. The treats should be tiny (less than 1cm in length) and readily consumable. Some options include soft jerky treats cut into tiny pieces, small pieces of hot dogs, small cubes of cheese, small strips of deli meat, etc. Consideration should be given to any medical dietary restrictions.

### Target Fist

When an animal is trained to attend to a target, they will follow that target, allowing the handler to easily lure them into certain positions (e.g., sit) and to redirect their attention away from competing attractions. Using the closed fist as the target makes great sense, since it is always with us. It also is a natural place to hold a treat. To train a pet to a target fist, simply put the tiny tasty treat in your hand and close the hand into a fist. Allow the pet to smell the closed fist, then release the treat. Usually after two to three repetitions, the pet readily focuses on the closed fist in anticipation of a tasty morsel. Then the fist can be manipulated in different directions. Where the closed fist goes, the head follows and then the body follows. If the target fist is brought from the pet's nose up and back over the head in a gentle arc, the pet will sit; if the target fist is brought up toward the forehead, the pet will make eye contact, etc. As the pet successfully completes these tasks, he is rewarded by release of the treat from the target fist. Once the pet has established great compliance with following the target fist, the food rewards can be intermittent from the fist.

### Giving Commands

Many people yell commands repeatedly at their dogs in order to achieve compliance. In all pets, but especially those with behavioral problems, yelling/loud voices can increase arousal levels and/or aggravate anxiety. Both of these consequences are counterproductive when you are trying to teach a pet to respond in a tranquil manner. Before giving the command, gain the pet's attention by saying their name, then the command should be given in a gentle voice and there should be a pause to allow the pet to respond. Responses are rewarded. Nonresponse or undesirable behavior is not rewarded, if the pet has a head halter on, you may be able to gain compliance with some gentle pressure. If this is not possible, the situation needs to be changed so the pet can be compliant. A pet that has anxiety or a competing undesirable response needs constant direction when exposed to the provocative stimulus. The pet should stay engaged with the handler via a constant dialogue. For example, the handler can say "Sophie, sit. Watch me. Stay. Watch me. Stay. Watch me." Success is unlikely if the pet is given a single verbal command such as "stay" and expected to hold that command for a prolonged period with the distraction present.

### Principles of Rewarding

When you are first establishing a new behavior, valuable rewards should be given every time for success. When the new behavior is firmly established, the rewards can be intermittent. For pets that have particularly challenging behaviors that we are trying to change their response,

consistent fabulous rewards will need to be maintained for significant periods before moving to an intermittent reward schedule. Rewards should be given immediately after the task is completed. Praise should always be part of the reward package in addition to other rewards such as food treats.