

# **Treats from the Sky**

## **How to teach dogs to respond without treats**

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Food is a powerful reward to use to teach dogs new behaviors or to increase the strength of existing behaviors. Luring is also a valuable tool to use to communicate to dogs what you would like them to do. It is important however to quickly teach dogs that it is worth it to respond to you even when you don't have food in your possession or in visual sight. We do not want to create "Show Me the Money" dogs that only respond if you show them the treat first. There are a few easy steps to follow to ensure that a dog is ready and willing to respond to commands at any time, food available or not.

- 1) Use Life Rewards. Ask dogs for behaviors such as sit or down before you give anything good in life. This can be things like food, water, throwing the ball for them, laser, getting out of timeout, petting them, etc. When they respond, give the good thing
- 2) Fade the treat lure quickly. When you first teach a behavior, you might use the treat to lure the dog into a position (such as sit or down). You also might need to use a lure to get a dog to do a behavior in a new extremely distracting environment like daycare. I like to only use a lure three times, and then switch to holding a "pretend" treat in my hand. When the dog does the behavior, he still gets a treat, it just comes from somewhere other than my hand (such as from your pocket). If you need to continue using the lure more than three times you should give your dog a treat other than the one you used to lure him into position. For example, use a treat to lure your dog into a sit, then give him a different treat from your pocket - do not give him the one out of your hand. This helps him to realize that the treat in the hand is not important.
- 3) Teach them that the opportunity for reward can appear at unexpected times. When dogs are off doing other things, surprise them by asking for a come or sit and then give them a treat. Do not get into the mode of constantly only asking for things when all the dogs are sitting around you knowing you are handing out treats to other dogs. We want the dogs to listen at all times, not just when the treats are out of your pocket and being dispensed to other dogs.
- 4) If a dog fails to respond, show him that he lost the opportunity for a treat or life reward. If you ask him to do something that he knows how to do and he fails to respond, take the treat and make a big show of giving it to another dog. If it was a life reward, show them that opportunity is gone as well. For example, put the leash away, put the treat back in your pocket or give it to another dog, walk away from timeout, put the ball down on the ground, etc. After 30 seconds, you can give them the chance to try again.
- 5) Only say the command once. If the dog fails to respond, show him he lost the opportunity. Repeating the command will usually not result in the dog responding any better and only teaches them that the word is meaningless or that they can get away with ignoring us.
- 6) Make sure your body language is not predicting the treat. Do not start reaching for the treat out of your pocket until the dog has completely responded. Dogs are masters of reading our body language and can use that to predict when it is worth it for them to respond. Some dogs learn that unless the treat is already in your hand that they won't get a treat, others learn the reach for the pocket. Make sure they quickly learn that treats come when they least expect it out of the strangest places and that your body language does not accurately predict a reward.