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Okay, go in a quiet room with your dog and have a bowl of really tasty treats. Food such as hot dogs, chicken, roast beef, etc. works really well, as do high quality (all natural) dog treats such as Natural Balance, Act Natural and Walkies. The treats should be cut up into very small pieces and be soft (crunchy ones take too long to eat) or have a large chunk from which you can break small pieces.

Now, as long as your dog isn't doing anything naughty at the moment, click your clicker (or say your bridge word) and give him a treat. Then click it again and again give a treat. We are NOT asking for a behavior (such as sit) here at all... just making the connection needed for the clicker to be effective. (A few dogs are frightened by the click sound at first. If your dog is sound sensitive, then try muffling the sound by having the clicker behind your back or in a pocket. The fear shouldn't last long!)

Repeat 5-10 times. You'll know when you can stop - you'll click and your dog will immediately look up at you, "There is that sound, so where is my treat?"

AN IMPORTANT NOTE! To really succeed with this method of training, it is essential that the bridge, whether it be a clicker or a word, ALWAYS be followed by a terrific reinforcement. It is usually referred to as 'click and treat' for a reason. That is one danger of using the bridge word... I found that I said "Yes" to my dog at times when I wasn't necessarily training and didn't follow through with a treat (or something equally rewarding for her).

Next edition's lesson: Attention!

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Mary Woodward is a dog trainer who runs a training school Greenwood Dog Training School. For more information go to www.clickerlessons.com

Sit Happens



Photo by Animax

Tips and Techniques for Training Your Pet with Trudi Thorpe - dogLOGIC

Trudi Thorpe runs a dog behaviour and training company dogLOGIC based in Sydney. As Trudi says "DOGS, DOGS, DOGS... A childhood obsession that I never grew out of." She devises and implements individual behavioural strategies and obedience techniques based on 18 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.

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Ask Trudi a question regarding behaviour by emailing behaviour@urbananimal.net

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Hi Trudi,

We have a 2 year old Labrador called Ben who is good at home, but in the park he is a catastrophe. Firstly, there is the park that we USED to go for a run and a social get together, but the minute we arrived, he would take off and dive into the filthy black water of the canal that runs the length of the dog park. Summer, winter, morning or evening – if we went to that particular dog park, he'd head for the canal and no amount of calling him back worked. It has now got to the stage that we simply don't go down there anymore because he just can't be trusted. We have now started attending another park that is surrounded by a significant amount of bushland and scrub. All seemed to be going well until last week when after rummaging around in the bush, he returned smelling like the vilest of vile decay after rolling in a mystery dead thing which as it now seems, is well hidden from humans and only available to dogs. I know this because we went to the park 4 times last week, and 4 times he managed to disappear clean (and freshly washed from the night before) only to reappear some moments later stinking of the same evil thing as the day before. He gets into trouble each time he does something like this, but it seems to have no effect whatsoever. Will he ever learn that his antics are unacceptable, or will we simply have to stop going to the park at all?

Madeline Toohey

Hi Madeline,

Sounds as if Ben is having an absolute ball in both parks, and whilst it may seem to you that he is being a "catastrophe", he is in actual fact, *just being a dog*. There are a couple of things to consider here – firstly, it seems that Ben has been straight forward, consistent and perfectly clear in letting you know his intentions in both parks. From your description, you can pretty well guarantee that if you go to the first park, then he's going swimming. If you go to the second park, he's going rolling. That being the case, it should come as no surprise when these things actually happen. Secondly, it's important to remember that it is not up to Ben to be responsible for his actions – it's up to you. You need to educate and guide him. There is no point in getting upset with him because this won't teach him what you want him to do or how you want him to act and behave in any situation.

Teaching Ben to come when called is a good place to start. This may sound simple, but in fact, teaching a dog to come when called (and to leave whatever he's having fun with) is one of the hardest things you'll ever teach him. What it means is that you have to be more exciting to Ben than whatever he's doing, ie. swimming, rolling in dead things, chasing cats, playing with other dogs and so on. Start teaching him to come at home, or in secure, fenced in parks and use a really good motivator (BBQ chicken is always a canine crowd pleaser!) to encourage him back to you and so that you can reward him for coming each time.

If you haven't already, it would be advisable to do some basic training with him so that he understands the basics – sit, stay and most importantly, come. This can be done either through a club or the increasingly popular adult dog classes that usually run over 4-6 weeks.

Predictable actions and reactions are a lot easier to manage than intermittent ones because you know what to expect. Use the consistency of his behaviour in each of these situations to your advantage and in the meantime either keep him on lead whilst you walk past the area in which he disappears to roll or swim, or simply take him to an oval where there are just wide open spaces and other dogs to play with. Then, over time and along with training, you can build up to the biggest distractions, the canal and the Bushland Park.

Don't give up! Investing time and patience into training now will be SO worth it. Especially when you consider that Ben is around for the next 10 – 15 years!

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Recommended by
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