

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

Hi Trudi,

Here's my problem. I have a 20 month old kelpie called Skip who is totally nuts about a ball. He will do back flips for a ball. He is not so food focused which is frustrating because that is what I am using for training. My friend has a German shepherd who LOVES food and works really well for it. Can I use the ball instead of food to try to get the best out of him or do I have to use food???

Paul

Hi Paul,

It is not only fine to use Skip's ball as reward over food – it is actually better!

Different things motivate different dogs, and as you have discovered, for Skip a ball is far more valuable than food. Like with humans, motivators to dogs come in all different shapes and sizes. Rewarding appropriate dog behaviour makes that behaviour more likely to occur in the future and is one of the most powerful tools you can use to shape or change your dog's actions. Having said that, it is important to take the time to find out what it is that your dog finds most valuable. Food is by far the most popular currency to most dogs, but there are also things such as a favourite toy, a game, praise or a cuddle etc. There are also such things as life rewards like being let inside the house for sitting quietly outside the door, or going for a walk in return for sitting patiently and waiting for the collar and lead to be attached.

If you're using a ball as the motivator for training Skip, it is a good idea to pick a ball that looks and feels different to all of his other balls so that it is special – and only use that particular ball for training. Keep it out of reach at all other times. Once Skip has learned the desired behaviour, start fading the ball out, ie. only produce it every second time and then every third time so that you don't need to be carrying a ball with you every single time you go out with him. Never fade the motivator out completely, reward intermittently so that the behaviour will be remembered.

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