



# DOG CARE



## *Building Confidence in your Dog*

Working with and training a submissive dog can in many ways be harder than a crazy, active dog. Taking the first step to opening your dog's eyes to a brand new world in which they will not be scared will make your dog's quality of life much better!

Recognising a submissive dog by their body language is easy. Look for a low tail and head posture. They will usually slink around with low posture, rather than walk confidently with their head held high. A submissive dog may also be hesitant to leave the side of their owner. Submissive dogs can toilet out of fear. This behaviour should NOT be reprimanded as it will only make the behaviour and fear worse.

Many dogs can be submissive or fearful due to genetic reasons, while others simply learn the behaviour. As a dog owner, it is your responsibility to assist your dog to build their confidence. If the fearful behaviour is due to poor genetics or socialisation is not addressed when it begins to surface, it can teach your dog indirectly that this behaviour is acceptable.

### **REMEMBER THAT DOGS GROW INTO BEHAVIOURS THEY DO NOT GROW OUT OF THEM**

Begin your training as soon as you bring your dog home. You should also bear in mind that...

#### **EVERY INTERACTION THAT YOU HAVE WITH YOUR DOG IS TEACHING THEM SOMETHING.**

*I.e If you pat your dog when they jump up to greet you, you are reinforcing the jumping behaviour, therefore teaching your dog to jump.*

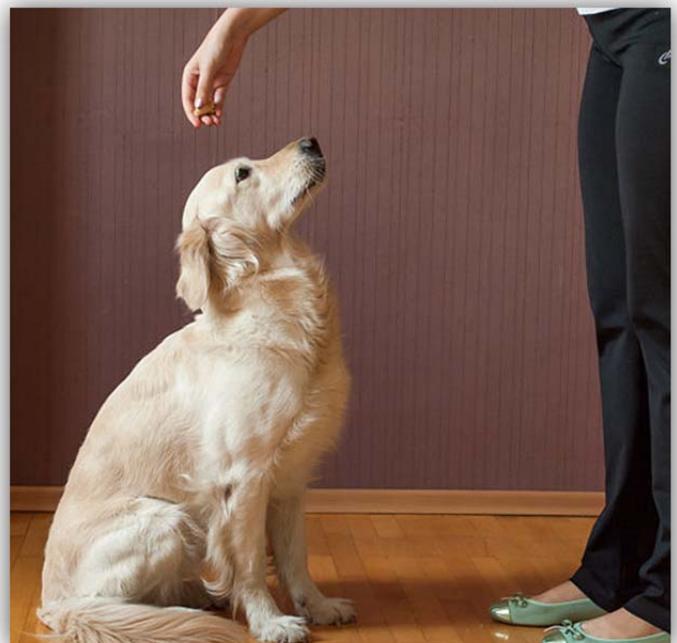
From a medical perspective, every time your dog displays or performs behaviour, the neural pathways in the dog's brain become more and more cemented, therefore becoming somewhat like default behaviour for the dog to display.

If we are able to "reset" the neural pathways to a desirable behaviour, such as sit, we are now starting to rehabilitate the dog.

Now that we have the above in mind, we can start to introduce new behaviours for our dogs via training.

#### **Where to Start**

We like to start teaching a dog with the base obedience position and command, sit. You should do this in the least stressful environment available for the dog. Then by coming back to these base



points in training sessions, your dog will have a sense of familiarity. Familiarity is the most important part of developing your dog's confidence!

Confidence is a key point to remember in training a submissive dog, the goal in training is to teach them to ignore a very strong internal distraction and focus all of their energy on performing their newly learnt behaviour. Using obedience commands to teach your dog how to navigate through confusing or terrifying moments is the key to getting them to come out of their shell.

We also like to use agility and problem solving games to build confidence in a dog. You don't need to have competition agility equipment, nor join a club to start. Common household items or things around your neighbourhood can be a great start.

Teaching a dog to jump up onto and off a chair, park bench, retaining wall, milk crate or similar can be a fantastic start.



You can also build confidence by getting your dog to sit and get them to catch food treats or a ball. You can play hide and seek with your dog around the home by hiding behind a door for example and calling your dog to come and find you. All fun games like this help to build confidence in your dog.

What we are doing during these training session is "creating the new normal" via changing the neural pathways in the dogs brain. As these new behaviours become the norm, new experiences will also slowly be less daunting as the dog learns that working through new challenges will breed confidence.

On this note it's important to know that dogs do not enjoy being in a stressful state, so when we "re-wire" the dogs brain to 'learn how to learn', we create an opportunity for the dog to help itself in stressful situations.

Another important point on obedience exercises that will assist you greatly with your dog is their tendency to go into avoidance mode, which involves running, crawling, lying down and jumping on you. Your dog is essentially doing anything to avoid trying something new. It is crucial to recognise that this is avoidance and is a deeply rooted fear reaction and not defiance. These actions must be addressed and fixed. Simply applying more pressure to the situation will not necessarily fix it; you will need to be patient with your dog.

Using food rewards also helps build a dog's confidence. We want our dogs to learn through encouragement and leadership, NOT from fear.

Should you require any further information or support please feel free to contact the Animal Aid team on 9739 0300 or email [kennels@animalaid.org.au](mailto:kennels@animalaid.org.au)

