



THREE RULES FOR CREATING POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS

Rule 1: Use Great Rewards

Pair new experiences with something your puppy loves like food or play. Figure out what his favorite treats are and reserve them for creating strong positive associations.

Rule 2: Ace The First Encounter

First impressions count. If your puppy's first encounter with something new doesn't go well, it takes a lot of work to change his mind. Always try to make first experiences particularly rewarding.

Rule 3: Timing Is Everything

You should reward your puppy as soon as something new happens, but it's important that the new thing happens first. For example:

1. You're out with your puppy and pass your neighbor's house.
2. You see your neighbor about to press the garage door opener.
3. You wait for her to press the button.
4. As the sound begins and your puppy's ears perk up, you treat him with yummy food bites and use a happy, cheerful voice.

The association we want your puppy to make: Garage door noise = Good things happen

Applying The 3 Rules

New place. Give your puppy plenty of time to explore and get comfortable. Try to get him to play with a toy, chase you, or toss some yummy treats on the floor for him to find.

New person. Ask strangers to stand at a comfortable distance while you feed your puppy treats. If your puppy is shy or unsure of himself, have people toss a few treats on the ground. If your puppy quickly warms up, have the person feed him out of the palm of their hand. You can also teach your puppy to sit (or any cute trick) so you can have people ask your puppy to do something. That stops them from immediately trying to pet your puppy, which can be overwhelming for him. Once your puppy is comfortable, go ahead and let him interact with the new person at his own pace. **PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE TO PET YOUR PUPPY.**

New dog. Not every new dog is guaranteed to play with your puppy, thereby giving your puppy a good experience. That means the reinforcement for meeting a new dog needs to come from you and the best time is directly after your puppy sees the new dog. Get in the habit of rewarding your puppy for simply looking in the direction of another dog. Not only will you create a positive association, but you will help prevent all-too-common behavior problems in adult dogs like barking at other dogs while on leash, barking at dogs (or people) when behind a fence, etc.

Don't rely on petting to create positive associations. First, not all dogs enjoy being petted. Second, even for dogs that love being petted, it's not a strong enough reward to create a positive association with something new and unknown. Dogs are petted all the time.)