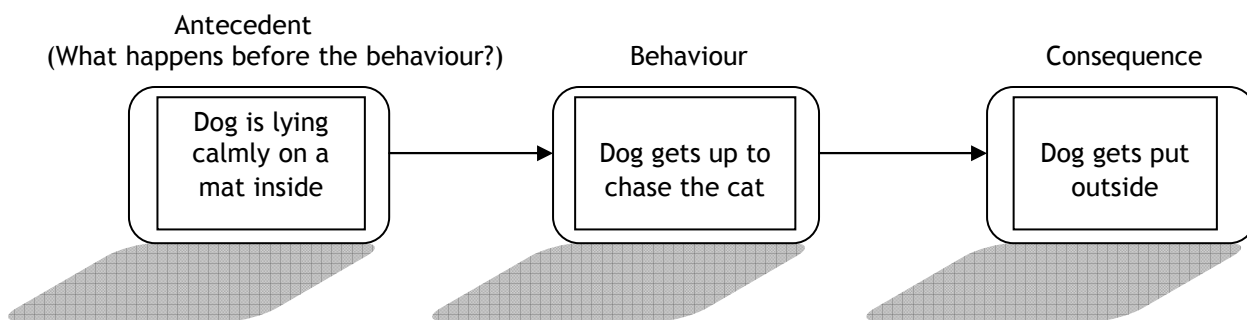


Safe and effective time outs

What is time out?

A time out is a social isolation. It is a form of negative punishment. That is, we are taking away something the dog likes (social contact with us) to help reduce an unwanted behaviour (e.g. mouthing).

Dogs learn by consequences:



Is it effective?

The use of time-out can be an effective training tool to reduce unwanted behaviours when used correctly. Dogs are social animals and love being with people. So being removed from this can cause some mild stress. It can help you to set clear house rules and boundaries in a non-threatening and calm way.

However, if the dog is anxious already or experiences more than just mild stress time-out should NOT be used.

Here are a few rules to ensure your time out training works:

When to use time out

Harassment of another pet (e.g. chasing the cat, playing too roughly with another dog)

Attention seeking behaviours (e.g. barking, pawing, mouthing)

Mouthing hands, feet or clothes during interactions with people

Timing

It must be immediate. If you wait even for a short period of time before moving your dog into a time out (e.g. longer than 1-2 seconds) your dog will not associate the time out with the behaviour they were doing.

Consistency

You must be consistent. That means everyone in the household needs to use a time out when required; otherwise the dog will get confused.

The time out area

The area needs to be easy to get to and it needs to be rather boring. Good examples are the laundry, toilet or simply on a tether out of the way. If the space is fun and exciting, it is like sending your child to their bedroom for a time out where they have a TV and a PlayStation!

So make sure the area isn't too fun (check your dog can't shred toilet paper or newspaper for example!).

If the situation doesn't allow you to put your dog in time out you can also walk away from your dog. For example if you are interacting with your dog outside and they start to be inappropriate such as mouth you, you can simply get up and walk inside. This is second choice only as it isn't as effective. You can use outside as a time out if your dog shows inappropriate behaviour inside the house (e.g. chasing the cat). This is effective if your dog prefers to be inside with you!

To get to the time out

Never drag your dog to time out. This will only teach your dog to be wary or even scared of you. If you have a small dog or puppy, you can pick them up gently and take them to the time out. If your dog is larger, just lead them gently by the collar or lead. If your dog learns to avoid being 'caught' to be put in time out, you can use a food lure, or you may want to remove yourself from the dog. I.e. don't chase your dog to catch them; they will think it's a great game and your time out will be ineffective. Also, if your dog is becoming more inappropriate (i.e. starts mouthing harder or bites you), then walking away is the better option.

Don't get angry!

It is important to not get angry when you are putting your dog in time out. Being spoken to, looked at or touched is generally reinforcement for behaviour; however some dogs may become scared of you. Getting angry may only teach your dog to avoid you when they have done the wrong thing, but it doesn't teach them what they should be doing.

How long?

In order for the dog to realise they have been placed in a time-out, they need to regain access to whatever was taken away quickly: very quickly, as in no more than 60 seconds. If you wait too long they can forget what happened and it simply becomes a change in scenery. Puppies require much less time i.e. as little as 5 -10 seconds.

How often?

You may need to use time out more than once - learning has to occur - most dogs learn after several repetitions that certain behaviour results in time-out as a consequence and the behaviour starts to decrease to avoid the consequence. Keep a record of how many times you do this each day so you can see the improvements.

What if my dog gets placed in a time out and whines, barks and scratches at the door?

Be strong and ignore this! If you give in and let your dog out of the time out space while they do this, you are rewarding this behaviour. If you have waited the 30-60 seconds and your dog is showing these behaviours, simply wait until they are quiet (and this can be a split second of quite while they take a breath!) then let them out quietly and calmly.

If this happens frequently, your time outs should be much shorter (e.g. about 5-10 seconds) to start with. (Again, remember that we do not use time-out for anxious dogs).

Prevention is better!

Hopefully you won't have to use time out for too long! No one likes to spend half the time they interact with their dogs putting them into time out.

So, it is important to set your dog up for success. Try to prevent inappropriate behaviours before they happen, and reward like crazy when your dog gets it right. That way, you can spend much more quality time with them.

Need further help?

Please contact our office on the number below if you require further help with your puppy or dogs behaviour.

Photo: Zoo Studio

