



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Deaf Dogs

Clicker training for deaf dogs

You can 'clicker' train a deaf dog just like a hearing dog; just with a visual clicker instead of an audible one. A touch activated L.E.D key ring (similar to that on the right of figure 1) is an ideal visual clicker. Use one that lights up as soon as you touch it and extinguishes as soon as you release it. This will help achieve the same level of pin-pointing of desired behaviours as an audible clicker.



Verbal cues

Even though your dog may not be able to hear you it is still important to use verbal cues. There are two reasons for this. First of all dogs are experts at reading body language and subtle facial movements so why not give them more clues to what you want them to do. By using verbal cues your face will more or less be consistent in its communication with your dog. Secondly by using verbal cues it helps you invest and focus on communication with your dog and it helps with timing.

Dog sign language

The internet is full of web sites about training deaf dogs, some of which are listed at the end of this information sheet. Some deaf dog trainers suggest various forms of canine sign language, some of these are based on human sign language systems and others are based on existing dog obedience gestures. We suggest using visual cues and hand gestures with hearing dogs, so why not use the same visual cues for hearing impaired dogs. You may also use a 'thumbs up' as a verbal marker when you don't have our visual clicker handy and maybe use clapping hands for 'good boy' or 'good girl'.

Attention and focus

Most dog owners struggle with getting and maintaining their dog's attention and focus. This challenge is heightened when your dog can't hear you calling their name to get their attention. The best way to overcome this challenge is to build a high level of focus and attention on the handler at all times. To achieve this it is very important to commit extra time to look at me and targeting exercises, rewarding for choosing to look at you and be close to you. For more on look at me and targeting exercises refer to our 'Look at Me' and 'Clicker and Targeting' information sheets. You can use these exercises to teach your dog to target to a 'target stick'; this can be a useful aid for smaller dogs or getting your dogs attention from behind or beside them.



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Socialisation

Socialisation is very important for any pup. This is even truer with dogs that have trouble hearing others. Enrolling your deaf pup in an appropriate canine kindergarten is a good way for your pup to learn about other dogs' non verbal communications. Outside of the 'school' environment try socialising your deaf pup with a very select group of vaccinated pups that can play and teach your dog to play in an appropriate manner (see our 'Does My Dog Want to Play' and 'My Dog Just Wants to Say Hello!!!' information sheets).

Come when called

Most councils require all dogs to be on lead at all times when in public, this is even more important with deaf dogs as they can't hear you calling them back, other dogs or a car approaching them. For this reason you should NEVER let your deaf dog off lead outside the safety of an enclosed yard. Purchasing a long lead, keeping within council regulations, is a nice way to give your dog some freedom and keep them safe. You may also like to acquire a laser pointer (similar to that on the left of figure 1). You can buy good quality laser pointers from most office supply or electronic and 'gadget' shops. This is going to be your visual voice when your dog is not looking at you. Be sure to shine the laser pointer in front of your dog's line of sight and not into their eyes, for obvious reasons. When they approach it draw a line with the pointer towards your feet. Once they are at your feet lure them into a sit with food, give a visual click, a treat and touch their collar (touching their collar gets them used to you putting the lead back on). At home, at night you can use switching a light on and off as a cue to come to a designated meeting spot.

Let sleeping dogs lie

If your dog is sleeping or resting don't sneak up on them. This may startle your dog and they may snap out of reflex. Dogs are masters of detecting and differentiating a variety of scents; they can usually smell you coming towards them, especially if you always wear the same perfume or cologne. Also try stomping your feet on your approach, dogs can usually feel the vibrations while they are lying on the ground.

Remote training devices

Some people will suggest using a remote training device such as a vibrating or shock collar. As the State's premier animal welfare organisation, we are opposed to the use of any devices that cause pain or suffering to our dogs. We use only positive training methods that align with the associations Five Freedoms for Animals, as below.

The Five Freedoms:

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
2. Freedom from Discomfort
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease
4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour
5. Freedom from Fear and Distress



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Vibrating collars that do not cause pain or discomfort to your dog may be a way of communicating with your dog at a distance but they do have some inherent disadvantages. Battery life and range are always variable factors from unit to unit. Like personal protective equipment, relying on these devices can develop complaisance in your training regime. There is no substitute for your dog choosing to give you their undivided attention regardless of how well your dog hears.

Resources

<http://www.deafdogs.org/training/>

<http://www.wagntrain.com/training-resources/stacys-training-tips/deaf-dog/>

<https://deafdogsrock.com/positive-reinforcement-deaf-dog-training-rocks>

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