



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Why we don't say No!

There is no doubt that saying 'No' will interrupt a behaviour, and that saying "NO" will interrupt a more extreme behaviour. You can observe frustrated animal guardians (and parents, for that matter) use "NO" when plain "No" doesn't work. Unfortunately, this is an escalating pattern.



Imagine Dad arriving home from a stressful day at work to be met by Fluffy who was adopted last week.

As the dog jumps up Dad mutters 'no', the dog responds by sniffing the man's lunch bag, as dad opens the door Fluffy rushes into the lounge room, Dad tries 'NO' but Fluffy has seen toddler daughters new fluffy toy and initiates a game of chase (or keep away depending on your perspective). Mum comes in carrying dinner for two children and crashes straight into Fluffy, she yells "NO!!!!". Finally, Fluffy is herded outside for the duration of the evening. This is repeated at least five times in a week. Fluffy has learned that people can be made to yell, lunch boxes smell good, kid's toys make great games and nights are lonely.

'No' can be effective at interrupting something. It appeared to work each time in the scene above. However, the volume and frustration frequently escalates over time to affect the same result - our dogs aren't learning anything constructive from the command. Why? Because 'no' really doesn't show our dogs what they could and should be doing in the challenging situation.

Bringing animals into our homes is like playing roulette. The animals have literally thousands of responses they could make in any situation, and generally only a limited number of these are responses acceptable to us. Instead of trying to exclude every behaviour we don't want, we should try and show our dogs what we do want.

Think about this: what exactly does "no" look like? We all know what 'sit' looks like for lots of different species... but what is "no"? It's just an interrupter! Usually, any response from us to a behaviour from your dog will increase the frequency of that behaviour. Animals will learn much faster if we teach the animal what is appropriate in each situation, instead of trying to prevent inappropriate responses.

In the above example, instead of allowing Fluffy to jump, if everyone meeting him lures or asks for a sit, Fluffy won't have to guess if this human is OK to jump on - he will simply learn not to



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

jump on humans. The new owners only have to do a little training, hand out the treats and teach all people the cue they use.

Now imagine the scene above: Dad arrives home from a stressful day at work to be met by the Fluffy adopted last week. As Fluffy goes to jump up, Dad takes a prepared treat from his pocket and lures Fluffy in to a sit. Dad rewards, Fluffy gives dad a nice a happy tail wag.. As Dad opens the door, Fluffy rushes to the door, Dad reaches into his pocket for another treat, and as Fluffy saw this move he sits beside the door. Dad brings Fluffy into the lounge room and settles him in his crate/on his mat with a long lasting chew. With a bit of encouragement, Fluffy learns to spend a peaceful evening with the family. In a short period of time Fluffy has learned that when dad arrives home from work he should sit to greet, he should sit beside the front door when being invited in, laying quietly in a crate/on a mat will get him some great chews, some nice attention and a whole lot enjoyment from the family.

© RSPCA School for Dogs 2018