

Training Tip Tuesday: Proximity

This is one of my all-time favorite exercises. It's an exercise I do with every dog; its easy, doesn't require any spectacular equipment, I don't have to down an espressos to muster the energy to do it, and It doesn't require any special skills.

Teaching your dog to LOVE being close to you will make training a thousand times easier. Think about your loose leash walking, or your recall. If your dog loved being next to you – how easy would those skills be? By simply rewarding our dogs when they make the choice to hang out with us, we can reinforce this mentality, improve our relationships and help our training in extraordinary ways!

Find a nice open space, and hook your dog up to a long line. (I always use a harness instead of a collar when im long lining for safety's sake.) The line I have in the video below is 50'. I am also rather fond of my 30' line. It all depends on the dog and the environment. Now for the hard part. Do nothing! Hold the end of the line, and wander about. Let your dog do whatever she pleases. Let her sniff, roll, wander.. but here's the key. Anytime she chooses to check in with you – reward her! Give her a treat, praise her up. If she's 30' away and stops to look back at you – capture that moment. Mark the moment she turns her head back to you with an enthusiastic Yes! If she comes in to see why you're suddenly so happy – reward her!

If something has her attention and she's standing at the end of the line, just wait. Eventually she will move on. If she looks to you – praise! If she just wanders on, that's okay! Some dogs get this exercise right away, others take time. You're building a foundation for a better relationship - it's okay to take as long as you need!

Many people fall into the trap of trying to 'help' their dog. They give a little tug on the leash, or call their name, then reward the result. This is okay – but it defeats the purpose of this exercise. We want the dog thinking and making the choice on their own, not because they felt the leash or heard you call.

If your dog just isn't getting it, and is just straining at the end of the leash and won't give you a second glance; go back inside. Find a room that's quiet, with no distractions. (no toys on the floor, no other pets, no children or spouses interrupting, no TV making noise) Take the leash/harness/collar off. Stand quietly. Observe your dog, but don't stare. The moment you observe them even thinking about looking at you; reward them. Praise them, give them a great treat, let them know how much you like when they acknowledge you! Once your dog starts getting the concept and is offering more attention; move to a different room. Practice in several different rooms; then add the leash/harness/collar. You may have to start over, and practice just like you did the very first time – depending on the association your dog has with you and his leash.

Once you can work successfully in the house, move to the garage, then the driveway, then the yard... etc.. gradually adding distance/distractions.

Now – before you say “she's only staying with you because you have food!” .. let me remind you of the difference between bribing and rewarding! If I had food in my hand, and was enticing her to follow the food – you might be right... but that's not what's happening. Dog has freedom to move around. Dog makes choice. I praise and verbally reward choice. She chooses to come in closer, I continue to praise and reward, then produce a treat from my pocket to reward as the final step. We then continue; treats go away, and I encourage her to move on again. The psychological impact of letting her make a decision

on her own, then rewarding it is far more important than the fact I have a few treats in my pocket! She's learning that staying near me is wonderful; and if that happens to involve food – so be it!

<https://youtu.be/4q2qk62wql4>