

# TEACHING YOUR FAMILY DOG



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# Teaching your Family Dog

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With thanks to Kay Laurence, Learning About Dogs for inspiration and patient teaching.

Cover Photo: Shadow, with thanks to Joanna Macintyre

# Teaching your Family Dog

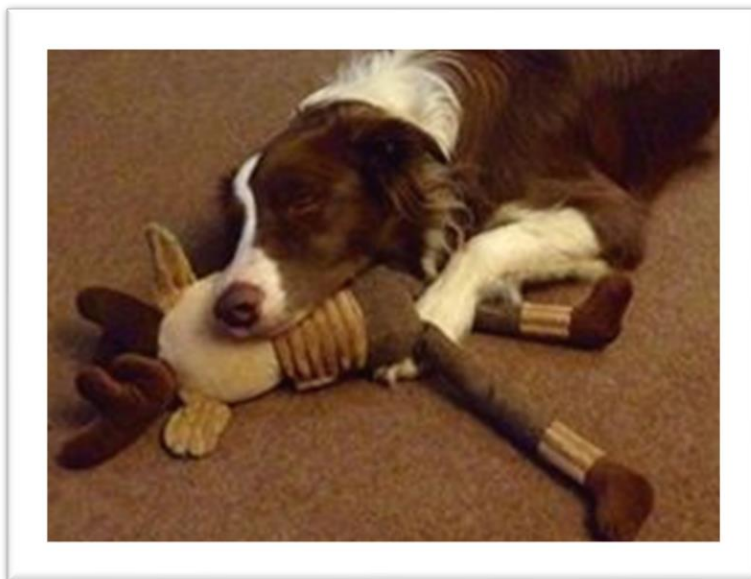
Welcome to this quick guide to teaching and training your family dog. You may be reading this because you are planning to add a dog to your family, have recently brought your new dog home, or you have hit a difficult patch and need some help. Whatever the reason, I plan to offer you the benefit of my expertise in this easy to read book.

## Remember this:

- 1. A dog is not a furry person or 'fur baby', a dog is a different species and genetically programmed to respond like a dog.**
- 2. A dog does not speak English. Dogs look for patterns that lead to rewards. Words, phrases and cues need to be taught.**

Many of the things that dogs do, which cause us irritation or annoyance are often natural and normal dog behaviours such as barking, chewing, digging, scavenging. Some of the things we find extremely problematic to live with are also normal canine survival behaviours, such as biting, guarding, hunting, reacting to other dogs, sounds and people.

My goal is not to change your dog, but help you understand your dog, manage their environment, and teach new behaviours. My methods are based around positive reinforcement, setting boundaries on behaviour, and using rewards to encourage an increase in safe behaviours.



## The History of Dogs

Dogs and humans have co-existed for centuries and the animal we recognise as a dog has evolved from the wolf. One theory is that when people began to form communities, the tamer wolves had confidence to scavenge amongst the waste the settlements created. As these wolves were more able to survive and successfully breed, their genes became stronger. Gradually tamer wolves and people began to co-exist. The early dogs did not live with us in the way a dog does today, they were not owned, but they hung around settlements, clearing human waste and food scraps, keeping the villages cleaner. Their tendency to alert and react to danger also benefitted the villagers by acting as an early warning system.

As these tamer individuals continued to breed with each other their appearance began to change. Experiments with foxes in Russia replicated this process and discovered that as the tamer individuals were selected and bred, their appearance also began to change. The foxes developed variety in coat colour, ears became floppy, they began to bark and vocalise. The foxes became playful, even into adulthood, and they started to respond to their name.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HslibD-TLcM>

These original village wolves, that now looked and behaved like an animal we would recognise as a dog, became valuable for their abilities to help people hunt for food, guard villages, and warn predators away from livestock. Today, some dogs still live as village dogs; most do not belong to a family as we would understand it, but some people form closer relationships with individual dogs than others.

## The History of Dog Training

Since dogs and people began to live together, people have been learning how to shape and utilise dog behaviour to protect their livestock and homes. People have also bred dogs to exhibit behaviours that assisted with hunting for food and managing livestock. Dogs have played their role in helping humans survive, and in turn we have provided them with food and protection.

Dog training for the family dog is a relatively new concept. Early pet dog training has its roots in the military where dogs helped with the war effort and required training. By today's standards this type of training would be considered harsh and punishing, although it still exists. Traditional obedience type dog training classes tended towards correcting or punishing 'bad' behaviour rather than teaching the dogs what to do. Aversive equipment such as choke/check chains were used to let the dog know they had made a mistake and dogs were forced or pushed into position.

In reaction to this kind of training, organisations that promoted force free, kind training were formed. It is far more common for dogs to be trained using food, toys, gentle touch and praise these days, although you can still buy, and freely use choke chains, prong collars and electric shock collars.

Another development was clicker training; developed from the work of B.F. Skinner, where a clicker marks the wanted behaviour, followed by a reward.

Although positive training methods are usually considered the norm, it is important to remember that they are relatively recent, and the old-style mindsets of dominance and control still exist. In fact, the most common type of training is a blend of the two, where people start off positive, but when the results aren't as expected punishment is quickly added.

Dog training and behaviour modification is now a huge industry, with new businesses springing up every day. Dog training is not regulated, there is no exam to be passed or standard to reach before someone can call themselves a dog trainer. Unless we are a member of a professional body that monitors our work or holds us accountable to certain standards, then we are free to work as we wish.

## **Dominance and Pack Rules**

During the 1980's and '90's problem dog behaviour was deemed to be the result of your dog becoming too dominant. At that time almost every dog training book had a list of pack rules that a family needed to follow so that the dog knew their place. Research in the late 1990's showed that this thinking was inaccurate and in fact was likely to make problem dog behaviour worse. Despite the length of time that has passed, dominance theory continues to circulate alongside the myth of pack leader and showing your dog who is in charge.

Urging people to become the 'alpha wolf' is also misleading. Within a wolf pack there is only one breeding male and one breeding female, these wolves were labelled 'alpha' by researchers in order to identify them. The only reason for a person to become the alpha would be to prevent their dog breeding, and as we are different species this doesn't make much sense.

The traditional 'pack rules' were drawn up based on research into wolf pack behaviour *available at that time*. The rules said that only the alpha breed, the alpha pair have the choice of sleeping place, the alpha pair have the first pick of any available food, the alpha pair will decide the route the pack follows, the alpha pair will lead the hunt. All other wolves in the pack will defer to them, will turn their heads aside and allow the alpha wolves to go first or move out. The other wolves always seek to be lower than the alpha pair.

From this list it is easy to see how rules for dogs emerged, such as:

- Never let the dog go out of the door first or walk ahead of you
- Decide where your dog sleeps and make sure you can take control of their bed
- Never let your dog sit on the stairs, get up on the sofa or bed
- Make sure you can take food away from your dog

Not only were these rules impractical and difficult to implement they often resulted in the dog become aggressive or flat and depressed.

These types of rules presented the dog as an enemy within, a being that was so intent on taking power they needed to be suppressed. Dogs are designed to be group animals, they

want to live co-operatively with us, they have the potential to be great friends and valued members of a family. Pack rules and dominance theories prevent this connection building between the dog and their family.

Modern research showed that the main preoccupation of a wolf pack was breeding and the survival of the pups. Constant fighting for dominance would be physically exhausting and risk injury. The breeding pair only eat once the pups or nursing wolf has been fed. Breeding males are sometimes too big and heavy to lead a hunt. Breeding females too pregnant or nursing to make pack decisions. Non-breeding wolves sit where they wish, sleep, eat when and where they can.

Wolf packs work like our families. Our goal is to ensure that the family eats, stays safe and the next generation thrives. Social dominance moves around, depending on who is best placed to lead at that moment. Sometimes the adults need to lead and take the decisions, but sometimes the younger members are better placed to do this. Age, maturity, and emotional development play a part, or safety and plain common sense. Just because your 13 year old wants to drive the car does not mean they get to drive the car. If you say 'no' are you being the alpha, the pack leader, or a loving parent?

If your family and your dog are living comfortably together then it is your choice whether your dog is allowed on the furniture or not, whether you sleep with your dog or not, whether you eat first or the dog eats first. We would only change these things if they were causing serious safety issues for you, the family, or the dog.

Dr. L. David Mech talks about the terms "alpha" and "beta" wolves and why they are no longer scientifically accurate. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNtFgdwTsbU>

## **The History of Socialisation**

The instruction to 'socialise your dog' is also relatively new and came from research that appeared to show that keeping pups isolated until their second vaccination had taken effect, was the cause of increased aggression and inappropriate reactivity.

It is true that pups have an optimum learning period, which takes place primarily between 4 – 12 weeks and in some breeds is extended up to 18 weeks, but this is not their only opportunity to learn. It is not true that during this period you need to introduce your dog to 100's of people, let them play free with lots of dogs, introduce them to new sounds, noises and experiences in order to have a well-balanced dog, who can cope with our modern world. In fact, this type of socialisation can have the opposite effect by overwhelming a pup, leading to an increase in anxiety, aggression, and overly reactive responses.

To read more: <https://www.clareteachingdogs.com/post/socialisation-what-is-appropriate-for-your-dog>

## **Activity**

Think about the specifics of your lifestyle and build a plan for your dog.

Habituation and familiarisation - What do you need *your* dog to get used to consider sounds, modes of transport, equipment such as a pram, walking frame, grooming, veterinary care etc

Socialisation – What people or other species does your dog need to be friends with? This list might be shorter than you think. My dogs need to get used to being handled by the vet, but they don't need to interact unless they choose to do so. My dogs need to get used to the rabbit living outside, but I have no requirement for them to play with him. Your needs and requirements may be different.

## Reflection

Being the pack leader – have you been told that your dog has behaviour problems because you are an ineffective pack leader? Do you worry that you are not the alpha? Can you understand why this may have been misleading or have a negative effect on your relationship with your dog?

Reflect on your dog and their personality, do you really feel they want to be in charge, lead the family, control or dominate you?

In an ideal world, children would be raised with a combination of – secure environment, role models, healthy food, education, values, exercise, play, social opportunities, boundaries. These events would be tailored to their age and personality. We can do exactly the same for our dogs.

# Teaching your Family Dog

## How Dogs Learn

Dogs learn in the same way as we do, our brains are similar. A dog's brain is much more active when processing sounds than ours, it is smaller in size, has less folds, and smaller frontal lobes. These features suggest that dogs are far more aware of sound than we are, have less ability for higher order thinking such as analysis and less ability to plan and make decisions.

In practice this means that our dogs are unlikely to 'know they have done wrong' or plan revenge because you have been out longer than expected. However, they can remember patterns, respond to sounds that we cannot hear and react quickly without considering the consequences.

## Positive Reinforcement

Most modern dog owners have heard of Positive Reinforcement (R+) and want to train their family dog using R+ methods.

Positive Reinforcement training has its roots in the work of B.F. Skinner and found its way to dog training via sea life mammal training with whales and dolphins. Not only are dogs now trained this way, but many zoos and wildlife parks also use the methods to administer veterinary care and enhance the lives of their animals.

Sea life trainers used whistles to signal to the whale or dolphin that the behaviour had been completed successfully and that food (fish) was available. Dog trainers began using a clicker, a small device that makes a metallic click when it is depressed. Both the whistle and the clicker were designed to bridge the gap between the behaviour being completed and the delivery of the food.

As with anything new clicker training became very popular and you will find plenty of videos with dog trainers using a clicker. These days I use the clicker less, especially when training a family dog. In my experience your dog is much more likely to be paying attention to your hand reaching for the food. If you have been trying to use a clicker and feel it is causing stress or confusion, put it away.

## Reward Training

Today I talk about rewards and the benefits of training with rewards. Understanding rewards and using them effectively benefits the relationship between a family and dog. You can tell if something is potentially rewarding as your dog will approach it. Once a dog has made an approach, learning will begin. Your dog will either learn that it is positive and approach again and again, or negative and try to avoid in the future. Only your dog can decide what is positive or negative for them, never compare your dog to other dogs, or let other people tell you what your dog should be feeling.



Withholding rewards, such as food, attention and play are often recommended, but this is designed to work by causing anxiety and is unfair. Withholding reward may also damage the relationship between your family and your dog. A strong, trusting relationship is the key to living safely and successfully with your family dog.

## Hands On, Hands Off

Because wild animals in captivity can be dangerous to handle, the training is, by necessity, very much hands off. When we adopted clicker training, which came from the captive animal world, into teaching dogs, hands off training also became popular. However, this is not the way most people want to be with their dogs, people enjoy stroking dogs and many dogs, but not all, enjoy the touch in return.

You will notice from my training videos that I often use my hands to help the dogs learn, this type of teaching by touch has a name 'moulding by contact' (MBC).

Teaching using your hands can be especially helpful for preparing a dog for veterinary examination or grooming, we call this husbandry. The rule is to use the lightest touch possible as a dog's coat is very sensitive and they are aware of the smallest changes; our own hair is the same, have you ever been aware of an insect landing on your head and instinctively reached to remove it?



Before reward and clicker training, touch was often used to push and pull dogs into positions against their will. I do not recommend using this type of touch as training often becomes a battle rather than a fun activity.

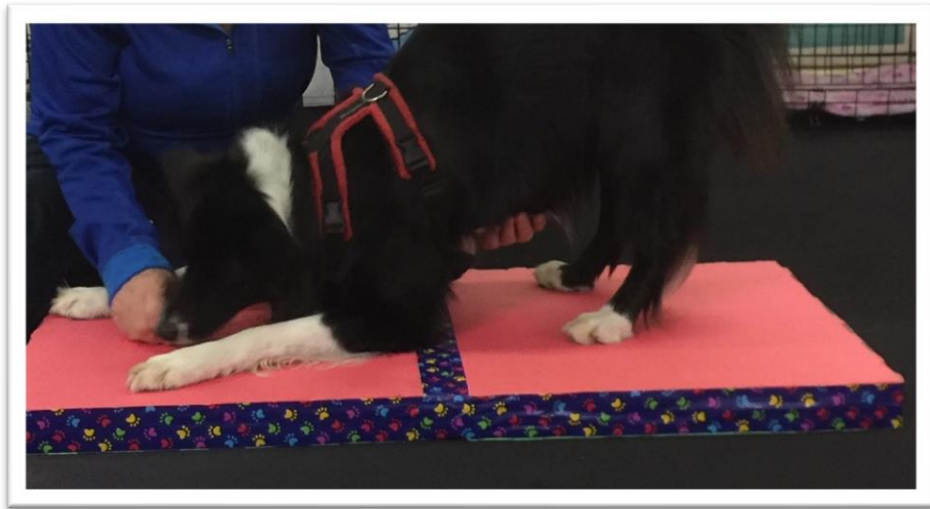
## Luring

Another way to use your hands and rewards together is called luring. Luring is a teaching method that is particularly good for new trainers and dogs that have not experienced a lot of training previously.

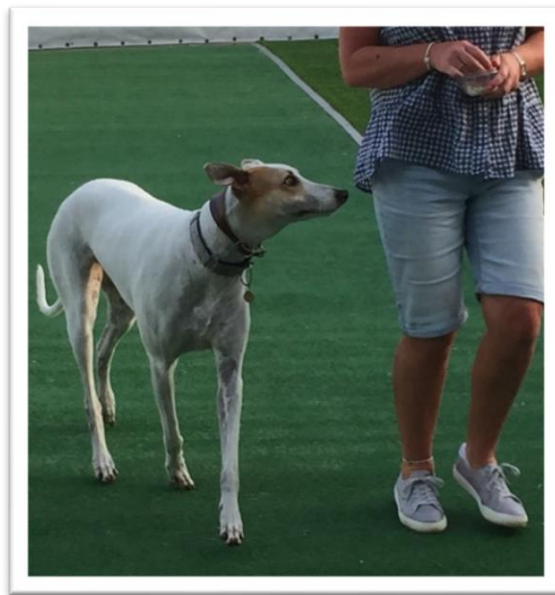
Luring is a directed learning strategy; this means you give your dog a lot of information about what to do. It is a much easier way for dogs to learn and because they do not become frustrated, it is a very safe method of training.

The definition of luring is "the direct use of the reinforcer to elicit the behaviour". This means that the reward is used to help the dog to perform the behaviour, and then the reward is given to the dog.

In this picture Flossie is being taught to bow using a combination of Luring with food in the hand and Moulding by Contact with hand supporting her chest. Bowing is a great exercise for conditioning muscles.



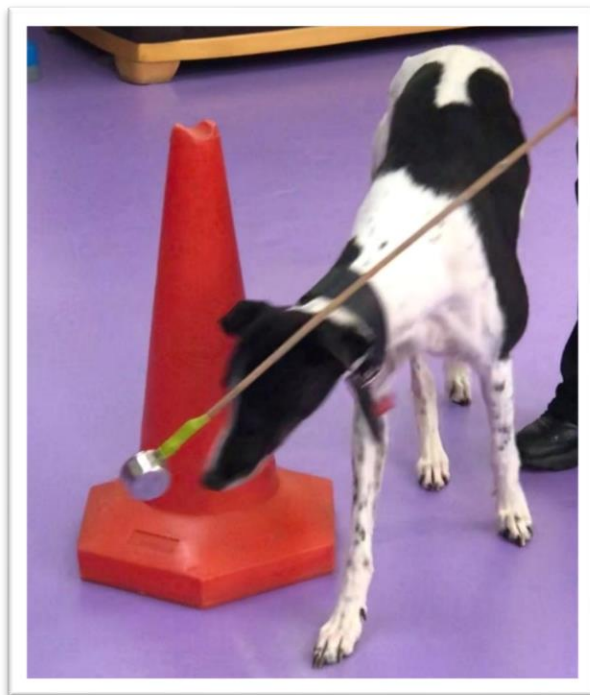
Teaching Walk with Me using Luring



This is another form of Luring called a Cup on a Stick (COAS)\*. There is a piece of food inside the cup and all the dog has to do is follow it; this is a useful teaching exercise for sensitive dogs or dogs that have been labelled reactive. It is also an activity that builds fitness and muscle strength.



We can use the Cup on a Stick to teach behaviours that help dogs grow in confidence, such as 'Go Around a Cone'.



\*With thanks to the creative mind of Kay Laurence, Learning About Dogs  
Ollie learning to stand on a platform in preparation for husbandry.



## Activity

Start a new page in your training notebook and ask, "What does my dog find rewarding?"

What will they approach? Do they prefer a reward if it is used in a different way? For example, your dog is not interested in the tennis ball lying on the ground, but the moment you throw, kick, or bounce it your dog comes to join you.

What about food, do they prefer food from your hand, thrown food or food in an interactive toy? Different types of food, smells or textures?

You can also consider touch, try this exercise: If it is safe to do so, touch your dog on a part of their body such as under the chin, stroke for a few seconds then remove your hands to your lap – do they return for more? If yes, then the type of touch you have used has been experienced as a reward.

How do you feel about using touch to help teach your dog? Experiment – imagine you are using the tips of your fingers on a keyboard, what is the lightest touch you can use on your dog? Are there any areas where your dog pulls away from touch, feet can be particularly sensitive for example? Avoid forcing your dog to be touched, you may stress your dog. Keep a note of any likes and dislikes in your training notebook for future reference.

## Reflection

Have you had a negative dog training experience with your dog in the past? Has this affected how you feel about training your dog today?

Are you still being advised to use harsh training methods or 'show your dog who is the boss'? I only use training techniques designed to build confidence in you and your dog to strengthen your relationship.

### **Further Reading**

<https://www.clareteachingdogs.com/post/start-training-your-dog-from-the-reward>

# Teaching your Family Dog

## Dogs Experience Emotions

Dogs experience many of the same emotions as humans.

As we discovered in the previous lesson our brains are very similar, but a dog's brain has smaller frontal lobes which means they have less ability to manage, control or rationalise their emotions, a dog is much more likely to react to the moment. How a dog reacts in any given moment is a product of their breeding and genetics, learning history, diet and health. Some of these we have more control over than others, for example changing the type of food your dog eats can make a difference.

The label 'reactive' dog is very popular and has replaced the previous labels of dominant or aggressive. Although it may seem controversial, from my point of view a reactive dog is a normal dog. Dogs were bred to react and to react very quickly to a variety of stimuli. It is their ability to react quickly that has made them so helpful as working and protective companions.

The problem is not that our dogs react in the first place, but that the reaction may be out of balance to the situation or may be accompanied by unsafe behaviour such as fighting or biting. Other behaviours that are normal dog behaviours, but may be experienced as a problem are:

- Excessive barking
- Chewing/shredding
- Toileting in the house
- Digging
- Chasing
- Jumping Up
- Growling

Many dogs end up looking for new homes or even euthanised because a family has been unable to resolve or effectively manage these canine behaviours.

## Common Emotions

Emotions are very hard to measure and define and for this reason there was a period when scientists argued that dogs and other animals did not experience emotions. From my experience dog people will say that their dogs express joy, pain, fear and anxiety. Other emotions dog owners report are:

- Grief
- Happiness
- Contentment
- Loneliness
- Conflict
- Anger



- Panic
- Empathy
- Disgust
- Shock/Surprise
- Trust
- Anticipation

Becoming aware of canine emotions and being thoughtful about the way your dog might be feeling, allows you to consider how and why a behaviour or reaction is occurring and explore different ways to help your dog feel differently.

## Fear and Anxiety

One set of emotions that can cause difficulties for owners are those we label fear and anxiety. These can spark off the fight and flight system in a dog's brain, leading to behaviours that make us feel unsafe such as reactivity or aggression.

Fear is an adaptive emotion which exists to aid survival. A dog with no fear may enter situations that cause injury or even the loss of life. Novel events including meeting new dogs and people, experiences or other stimuli should evoke a mild fearful response, and this is normal.

You will see your dog:

- Stop
- Move their ears
- Lift their chin
- Close their mouth

These behaviours allow your dog to assess and process what is happening. It is a mistake to attribute this stopping behaviour to dominance, defiance or stubbornness and drag your dog into a situation where they may feel overwhelmed.

Pups and young dogs need to spend a lot of time assessing their environment, learning what to be afraid of and what is safe to approach. It is an essential developmental activity and should be the purpose for taking your pup out and about.

Sometimes dogs miss this confidence building period of development, maybe they were raised in a restricted environment, such as a rescue centre, or experienced an illness or injury which confined them to a crate or their home and garden. One of the most common reasons for dogs to miss this period of assessment is that we, as new owners are not aware of its importance.

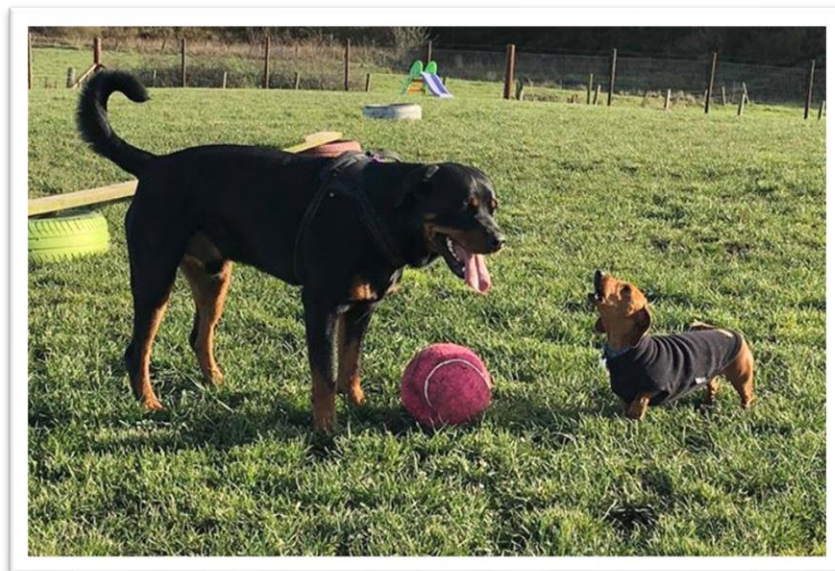
When a dog is given appropriate opportunities to assess, absorb and adjust to changing circumstances, learning and maturity take place. Behavioural and emotional responses



modify over time. Without time and space, dogs are often left with no option, but to escalate their reactions to try and communicate how they feel. As dogs have strong jaws and sharp teeth, these escalations of response can be unsafe for us, other people, and other dogs. At the extreme dogs can even be euthanised because their early attempts at communication were misunderstood.

Once a dog has had an opportunity to assess an event as fearful and has been protected by his owner or has been able to move away, the fear should quickly subside. Unresolved fear or prolonged exposure to stressful situations can become long term or generalised anxiety.

Short term anxiety can be useful to help us plan and prepare or adjust our behaviour appropriately. Dogs do not plan ahead, but they can be very skilled at adjusting their behaviour when meeting new dogs or to help younger or less confident dogs join in with play. One of the most common behaviours you will see is a dog turn their head away, giving the other dog opportunity to stop approaching and adjust their behaviour.



Long term or generalised anxiety is maladaptive, your dog may show quick, unexpected reactions in situations, places or with people where he used to be happy. This is very common after a traumatic experience or series of stressful events.

This anxious state can affect your dog's skin – itchy or flaky, or their digestive system – particularly loose stools or excessive urination. Also, there may be changes in your dog's sleep pattern and their general energy levels. Most importantly, the continuous exposure to stress hormones can damage brain cells, making learning and remembering very difficult. If you feel your dog is overly anxious, begin with a visit to your vet, and then ask an experienced behaviour professional for more help.

### **Seeking Reward, Anticipation and Play**

Seeking reward is also an adaptive emotion that aids survival. In order to survive a dog needs shelter, food and water. For the species to survive dogs need to find a mate and have litters



of puppies. To be able to go out and find these things a dog needs to feel motivated, experiencing success causes a dog to feel more motivated to repeat the behaviour. You may have seen this with your own dog, one day they discovered that squirrels run up a certain tree, now they check the tree out on every walk just in case...

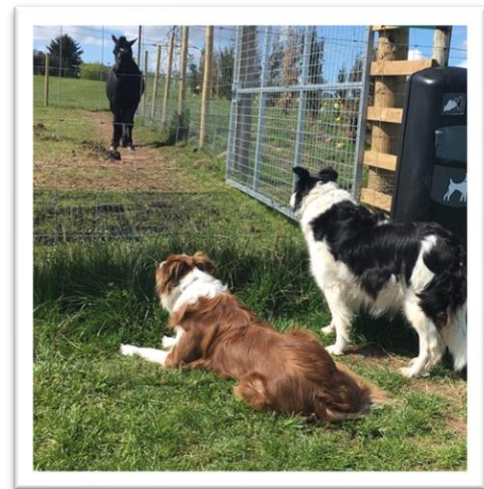
A dog that does not make the effort to eat or go out for walks may be described as depressed.

Once a dog's basic needs are met, they will usually start to explore and may want to play. Some dogs like to play with lots of different dogs and others only want one or two friends. Taking some time to assess which type of dog you have is important, many dogs are forced into interactions with strange dogs that they do not enjoy. Dogs will not play if they are scared or unwell, learning about your dog's normal play pattern can help you assess how they are feeling.

Most dogs enjoy the anticipation of play – a ball being thrown or a chase game with other dogs. Some dogs anticipate quietly, others bark and get very excited.

### Brain Chemicals

Dopamine is a chemical that is present in our brains and in a dog's brain. It is associated with the experience of reward and one of the reasons why we and our dogs 'feel good'. If we could examine the brains of the two dog's, in the picture, quietly anticipating the movement of the horse behind the fence, we would find lots of dopamine and other 'feel good' chemicals, because they are carrying out a breed typical behaviour and feeling satisfied.



Appropriate levels of activity and feel good chemicals leave our dogs content and able to rest and relax. However, they can have too much of a good thing and an overly aroused dog will appear frantic, frenetic, either unable to rest or sleep even collapsing in exhaustion. Under these conditions, dogs may also snap, bite, or fight with others or cause themselves injury. If you are experiencing any of these behaviours from your dog it may be worth your while to check that their day is well balanced with lots of rest interspersed with appropriate play and exercise.

Dopamine producing activities can provide some relief from fear and anxiety, whilst helping a dog to learn. Our games and teaching activities are designed to ensure the dogs experience appropriate levels of reward without becoming overly aroused enabling them to learn. Dopamine production can also be enhanced by diet and it is worth doing some research to discover if your dog requires a diet change.

## Activity

Breed Typical Behaviour - What was your dog bred to do? If your dog is a mixed breed you may see the traits of one breed as more dominant than the others. Are you able to give your dog a safe outlet for these traits through play?

Balanced Lifestyle – Is your dog's life in balance? Keep a health and activity log, dogs need plenty of rest and sleep with short periods of activity in between, supplemented with a nutritious diet.

Play – what are your dog's favourite toys and games? Remember, that a dog's idea of what constitutes a toy may not be the same as ours. Do they play safely, no injury to themselves or others? Are you able to interrupt their play now and again?

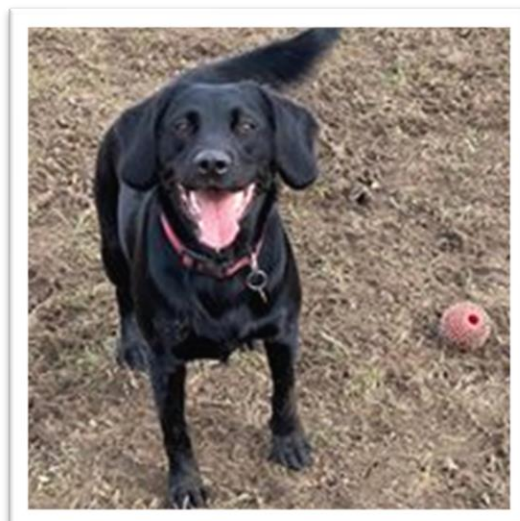
Confidence Building – If your dog has missed the assessment period of development or shows a lack of confidence you can take them to places where they can improve their assessment skills. Choose places where they can safely watch activity from a distance e.g. bikes, wildlife, children playing, dogs playing etc. If your dog does not feel safe, they may bark or cower behind you, if this happens create more space by moving away from the activity.

<https://www.clareteachingdogs.com/post/the-canine-world-of-play>

## Reflection

Have you ever been given some well-meaning, but unhelpful advice?

Do you feel under pressure to have a well-behaved dog? Social pressure can make living with a dog labelled fearful or reactive feel very isolating, there are many Facebook groups, including our own group, [The Dog Learning Space](#), who have members who can empathise and share handy hints and tips.



# Teaching your Family Dog

## Language Used Around Dogs

Being aware of the language we use to describe our dogs is important because it affects how we feel about them and how we approach teaching.

### Describe your dog

Take some time to observe and think about your dog, how would you describe them to someone else – write your words down:

Some examples are:

Sensitive, Energetic, Thoughtful, Careful, Playful, Loving, Affectionate, Charming, Determined, Intelligent, Confident, Focused, Intense, Driven, Happy, Busy, Cheerful, Agile, Flexible, Fast.

Take a moment to look back over your list. Would you say your descriptors are mostly negative or positive?

### Stubborn – really?

One description that comes up time and time again is 'stubborn'. In my experience dogs are rarely stubborn, rather they are always doing their best to understand what is happening. Very often we are poor at putting information across clearly and consistently. Instead of stubborn why not describe your dog as determined or motivated?

## Using and Assessing Labels

Stubborn is just one popular label we use to describe dogs. Labels can be a useful shorthand, but there are some labels that are unhelpful.

Labelling is a survival mechanism. Our brains are working very hard trying to help us survive, and the brain needs to conserve energy whenever possible. If the brain can identify patterns and add a label it can efficiently and effectively make sense of our world. Once our brain has labelled an event it can relax and get on with other tasks.

Labels work well when they help us convey information quickly and cause a behaviour change. For example, you are in the vets waiting room, another owner lets their dog begin to approach yours. You use the label nervous, 'my dog is feeling nervous', and this causes the other owner to withdraw their dog quickly, usually apologise and then keep an eye on their dog. In this case the label has been appropriate and effective.

Labelling also has a shadow side. Once we add a label to a dog's behaviour, we stop being curious, stop asking questions and stop assessing and usually prolong the unwanted behaviour.

For example - what colour is this banana?



If you answered Yellow, does that mean that these are no longer bananas?



Saying that bananas are yellow is a useful guide, it will help us survive by identifying a safe food source.

When we are learning about bananas in general, our brains work a bit harder and ask questions such as:

- Why are the other bananas black and green?
- What does this mean for my survival, can I eat them?
- How will they taste?
- Do I eat them in the same way?
- Will there be any after-effects?

By asking these questions and becoming curious, we learn a lot more about bananas and some new skills around using them for safe food such as making banana bread. We can still generalise with the label 'bananas are yellow', but we have the experience and knowledge to know this may not always be true.

## Labels from Dog Training

The following are common unhelpful labels I've come across in the dog world

Obedience – personally I hope my dogs are never labelled as obedient. From my experience dogs who are forced into obedience also tend to be anxious. If we make a healthy relationship and positive teaching the priority, co-operation and working with us will come naturally.

Doggy Manners – this is another label for behaviours that make us feel safe. The downside of this label is that many of the programs focus on suppression of behaviour and emotion for example, sitting, rather than teaching and building safety behaviours which account for the emotional state of the dog.

Fur Baby – I'm all for building relationships with our dogs, but the label 'fur baby' can cause us to forget that dogs are a different species and genetically programmed to respond like a dog. Many of the things that dogs do, which cause us irritation or annoyance are often natural and normal dog behaviours. Barking, chewing, digging, scavenging, biting, guarding etc are all 'normal'.

Nice, Naughty, Good, Bad, Friendly etc – these are all judgements. Judgements can only be made after we have assessed and evaluated. Making quick judgements is another survival mechanism but can be unhelpful when we are seeking long term behaviour changes.

## Reactivity

All living organisms need to be reactive in order to survive. Without the ability to react we wouldn't be able to respond to opportunities for reward or move away from danger. Our brains are constantly assessing the environment for changes and motivating us to react.

Reactive dogs tend to be very sensitive to the changes in their environments, noticing and responding to multiple changes whilst displaying behaviours that make us or others feel unsafe.

## Activity

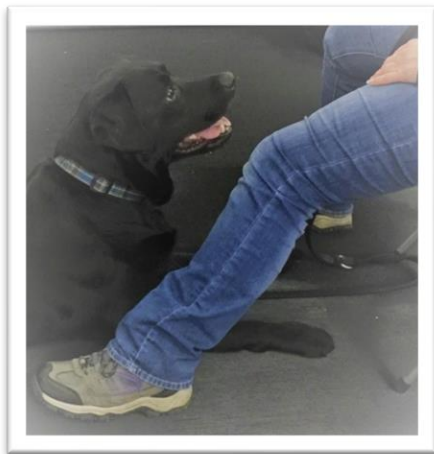
Revisit your list from earlier, are there any descriptors you would change? Are there any labels that you have heard dog trainers use that you don't really understand? For example, High Drive or High Value Rewards. If you need help unpacking any of these labels drop me a line [clare@clareteachingdogs.com](mailto:clare@clareteachingdogs.com)

# Teaching your Family Dog

## The Language of Hands

Dogs find our hands incredibly important because hands provide a great deal of information for them. One of the foundational skills for every dog teacher to learn to use their hands safely to communicate with their dog.

Dogs are very good at learning patterns, particularly patterns of our behaviour, we are constantly 'talking' to our dogs with our body language and, in particular, our hands. From the moment their eyes open, dogs raised by people see human hands; hands that feed them, hands that lift them, hands that hold them. What your dog learns about your hands is something, that with awareness and teaching, you can control.



Hands cannot be 'doing nothing', hands reaching for an item, hands in the air, hands in pockets can all be relevant to a dog, because of what might happen next.

Hands can do so much for dogs such as providing a piece of food, delivering a scratch, throwing a toy etc., dogs know this and pay attention to them, just in case...

Brains like to predict what might happen next, this is an aid to survival, the way our hands move help a dog's brain carry out the prediction process. Your dog will be trying to predict whether the hands are likely to deliver reward or punishment. A dog will notice the speed at which your hands move, the shape of your hand, the location of both hands and the likely destination.

Some hand movement patterns are particularly salient e.g. putting the hand into a pocket or moving quickly towards the neck or collar. The latter may signal that a lead will be attached for a walk or equally that the collar may be grabbed to move the dog forcibly from A – B, prevent forward movement, pull them up in the air or pin them down (an alpha roll) which was an old-fashioned handling manoeuvre and no longer recommended.

You are most likely to be using your hands to perform two functions:

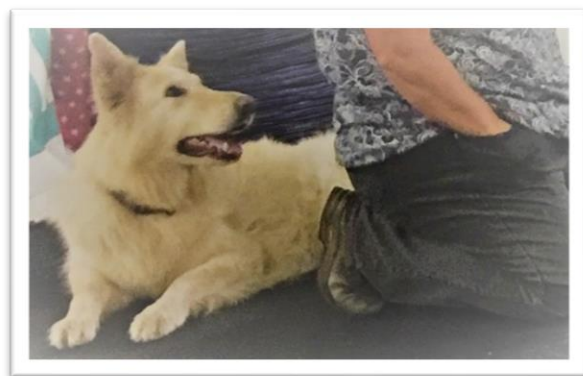
1. Provide care – feed, groom, stroke
2. Communication – go this way, get this, come here

***Problems arise when we are not clear on what we want our hand movements to mean or haven't taught the language of our hands to a dog.***

We can also complicate things by:

- using our hands to deliver punishment – pinning a dog down, squirting with water
- withdraw good things – covering or removing a treat if a dog moves forwards
- using our hands as targets - nose touch to a hand for example

A dog who feels confused or suspicious of hands may resort to avoiding, trying to escape or biting. Many dogs end up looking for new homes or even euthanised because a family has been unable to resolve or effectively manage communication of their hands with their dog.



### Key Skill – Food Delivery

A normal dog will feel some competition around food, they have experienced competition in the litter, an essential learning experience that teaches a dog how to adjust their future behaviour to ensure survival. If your dog was from a large litter, one of the smallest or the 'runt' they may be overly competitive, and this may stay with them for the rest of their life, no matter how large they grow or how much food you provide. You can also see similar behaviour from rescue dogs that have experienced food deprivation at some point. You may not see this behaviour if your pup was a single or hand-reared.

Healthy dogs tend to appear constantly hungry, especially puppies. Eating plenty when food is available is another survival behaviour, you will not see this desire if your dog is overfed or unwell.

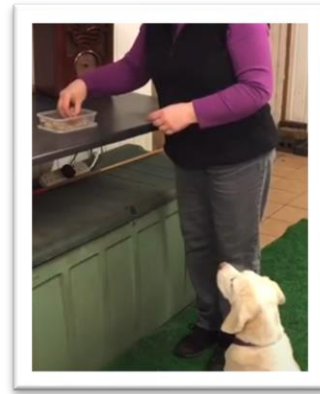
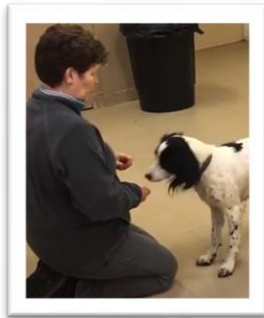
As food is so important for survival, dogs become excited and competitive just from the scent of food and for this reason it is best to begin training when your dog is only slightly hungry rather than starving, which is now out-dated advice.

We are going to teach the dog that our open hands are a source of great pleasure and something our dogs *always* want to approach. In the future we will use these open hands to attach a lead, care for the dog and offer food or affection.



## Step 1 – Choose your start position

Depending on the size of your dog, you may choose to start from kneeling, sitting on a chair or standing. If you are standing put the food on a counter. You can place your store of food in a plastic tub, food bowl or in your hand. Avoid using a treat bag or pouch at this early stage as you will find it harder to deliver the food effectively.



## Step 2 – Begin delivery

Place a piece of food from the store into the centre of the palm of your hand. If it is safe to do so, offer the food to your dog just under their chin or drop it onto the floor from waist height at this stage.

Delivery videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIw70rXT-X0>;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YKv4-aM2Rw>



## Step 3 – Add some movement

This time place the food between your fingers, turn your palm upwards and invite your dog to follow. Keep your hand still, avoid moving it towards and away from your dog's mouth. If



your dog does not follow at this stage, open your hand, and deliver the food towards the floor.

If your dog is likely to jump or snap upwards to your hand, keep delivering the food very quickly, until your dog feels confident that food will always arrive.

You can also place the food into a container, such as a baking measuring cup, this gives clarity to the dog whilst offering extra protection to your hands, also useful if you have any issues gripping food between your fingers.

Adding movement demonstration videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJRw6bGCngM>,



#### **Step 4 – Deliver food to be chased**

Chasing is a normal part of dog play and delivering food so that it can be chased, captured, and consumed can be great fun for our dogs. If your dog is a reluctant eater or anxious about taking food from your hand or eating close to a person, then this delivery method can be a better starting point.

A quick note about the difference between competition and contest. A healthy dog will have experience some competition around food, this is an inbuilt survival mechanism to ensure the dog seeks out a meal. It would be unusual for a dog to experience much anxiety in this situation, a little stress will ensure they get up and hunt, but there will be a confidence that the hunger can be satisfied.

However, some misguided advice such as 'always be able to take food away from your dog', or an experience of starvation or erratic feeding, chronic pain or illness etc., can leave some dogs very anxious around food and this anxiety may never go away, no matter how well you feed them. If you have a dog that is anxious around food, be sure they are satiated before training and avoid asking for extra behaviours such as 'sit' before delivering the food. Always be a source of plenty and build your dog's confidence.

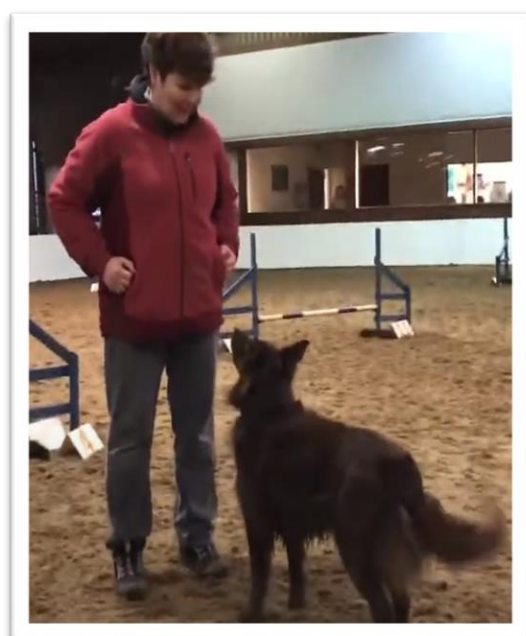
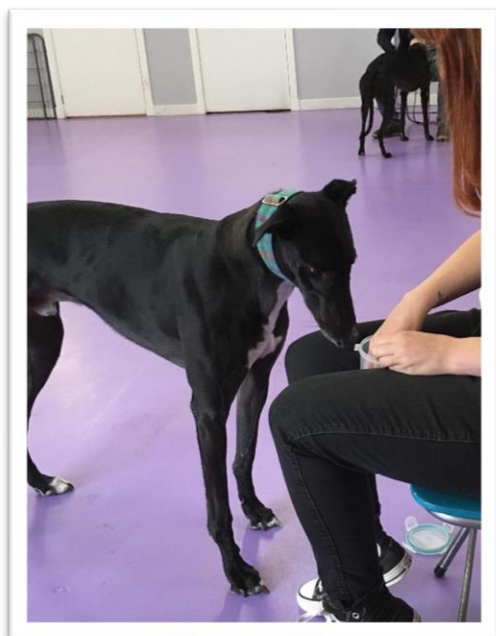
When dogs are healthy and well fed, they will enjoy contest as a part of play. You will know you are witnessing healthy contest when a dog 'handicaps' itself to keep another dog in the game. In this video the labradoodle could outrun or even fight off the spaniel, instead she keeps checking that the spaniel is still in the game and then slows down to allow the spaniel to catch up. <https://www.facebook.com/Dogplaylothian/videos/746000116206610/>

We can replicate this contest into our chasing food delivery:

1. Deliver with care – use your hand in a bowling motion, give your dog time to see the hand and follow the food as it leaves your hand and hits the floor. If you are able turn your body in the direction the food is travelling as well.



2. Help your dog out – if your dog cannot find the food, run to it quickly, point the food out and return to your starting position.
3. As your dog grows in confidence begin to take your time selecting the food, time to practice your acting skills, look for the very best piece of food in the tub, this helps the dog to develop an intense focus on you and your actions. This can be particularly useful for dog's that are sensitive to their environment and in my experience, far more effective than the old 'look at me' command. The key is to make sure your dog is experiencing this as a contest and not a competition.

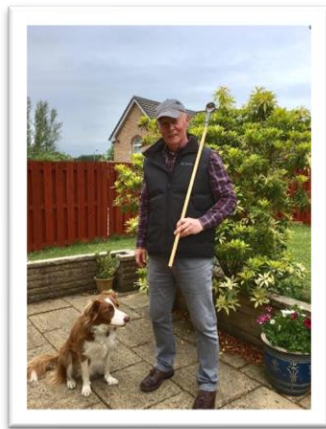


## Step 5 – My hands are empty

Take time at the end of a training, feeding or play session to show your dog that your hands are empty. Remember your dog is always watching your hands, they deliver important information. If there is ambiguity or confusion you are more likely to experience problems such as a dog that continuously barks for more food.

My favourite 'we are no longer training' signals are

1. Parking - [https://youtu.be/twcaNBCKe\\_M](https://youtu.be/twcaNBCKe_M)
2. Show my dog empty palms of my hand
3. Placing the cup on a stick on my shoulder



# Teaching your Family Dog

## Safety Behaviours

Behaviours for dogs are that increase their safety.

At classes I teach people how to build a range of safety behaviours for their dogs such as:

Go behind person when feeling unsafe

Wait with stillness when food or toys are present

Jump into the car and wait when door opened

One that is very useful is to be able to stop at a threshold such as a door or pavement.

## Life Skill – Stop at the door

There are many situations where we need to ask our dogs to stop and wait whilst we check out the environment.

If dogs can stop and wait at a doorway or gate, you can go ahead and check that everything is safe. This may be especially helpful if you live near a busy road, have young children to manage, or dogs that need to be kept separate from each other.

### Step 1 – Choose your food reward

We are going to teach the dogs to stop at the door or gate when we stop, therefore you need a piece of food that can be placed at your dog's feet, doesn't roll around and can be seen against your flooring. If your dog has any problems with vision, then pick a highly scented food.

### Step 2 – Collect the food and engage your dog

Most dogs are very aware of where the training food is stored and will arrive at the fridge or cupboard before you, but if your dog is new to training you may have to employ some acting skills and become animated about collecting and preparing the food. Avoid looking at your dog as you do this, focus on the food instead, dogs are co-operative hunters and instinct will cause them to become interested in anything that interests you.

### Step 3 – use the food to cue an action of 'follow'

This time place the food between your fingers, turn your palm upwards and invite your dog to follow. Keep your hand still, avoid moving it towards and away from your dog's mouth. Dogs read intention very well, they know which way you are planning to go, therefore, point your feet and turn your shoulders in the direction you are planning to travel. Look forwards if you can. Move towards the door with your dog.

## **Step 4 – Deliver food**

Cue your dog to stop by slowing down and lifting your hand. As you stop, place the food on the floor and take a step forward. It is not essential for your dog to sit, but many pet dogs will interpret the lifted hand as a cue to sit, either sit or stand is fine, whichever your dog chooses.

If the dog is hesitant about taking the food without your permission, tap the food to encourage them.

If your goal is to be able to step out of a gate and then close the gate, you may find it helpful to progress the training by placing one piece of food and then scattering some more, this will give you time to get out of the gate and close it.

## **Step 5 – Fade the food**

Once your dog has the idea, make the same hand gestures, but this time there is no food in the hand. Keep the food in secure tub, out of reach, besides the door or gate, or you can carry the food in your spare hand.

Begin to add some verbal cues. In my video with the more experienced dog I say 'stop' and then ask the dog to 'wait', use whichever words your dog understands or suit you best.

To increase the amount of time the dog stays still, I deliver the food by tossing it back to him. If I want the dog to join me, I invite him to come forward and collect the food.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weSKMlilkeg>

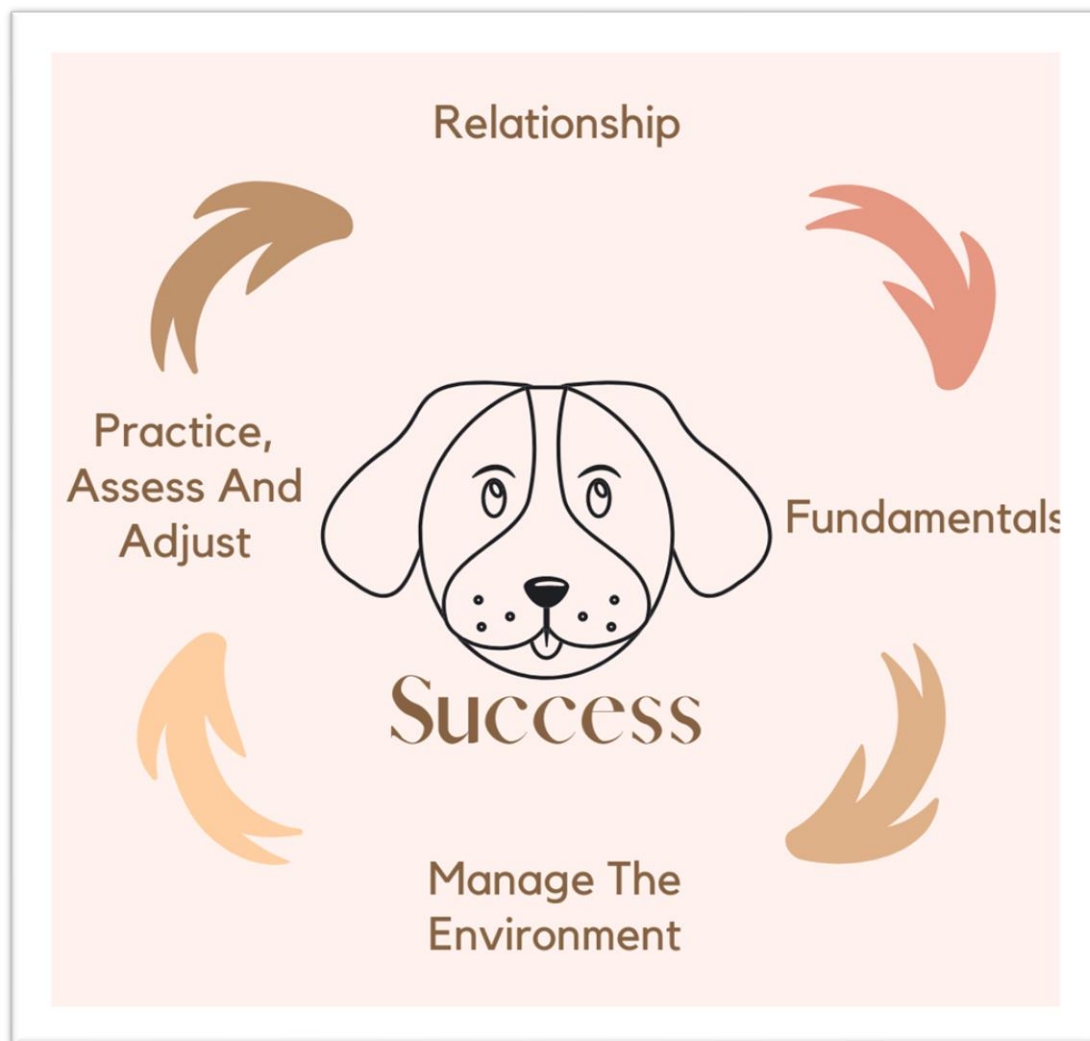
# Teaching your Family Dog

## What Next?

This book has been a brief introduction to my world of dog training.

Experience has taught me that success comes from:

- having a strong relationship with your dog
- training fundamentals – knowing your dog, planning and preparation
- managing the environment
- practicing, assessing the results, and adjusting for the next session



**“Dog Training – A Conversation Between a Person and Dog”**

## Work With Me

If I have sparked your curiosity to learn more about teaching your family dog, then there are plenty of ways I can work with you, and help you do this.

### Classes and Group Learning

Natural Dog Learning, lessons designed for dogs to learn at their own pace. I use teaching games and learning activities to match each dog's natural development.

Suitable for dogs of all ages and abilities.



Message me to book your place [clare@clareteachingdogs.com](mailto:clare@clareteachingdogs.com)

### Online Courses

Distance is no longer a barrier. Self-paced, online courses:

[Walking Together](#) – struggling to walk your pulling or reactive dog on a lead, this course is for you.

[Rescue Dog](#) – settling in a new rescue dog or hit a sticky patch, this course will help explain what is happening and give some practical training tips to help you resolve the problem.

[Foundations of Agility](#) – preparation for agility classes, also a confidence builder for Sensitive Dogs.

## Private Lessons

Private face to face or online lessons are available, drop me a line to book your session  
[clare@clareteachingdogs.com](mailto:clare@clareteachingdogs.com)

Visit my website for more information: <https://www.clareteachingdogs.com/work-with-me>

## Discover more

Facebook Group – [The Dog Learning Space](#)

Join my [mailing list](#) for more hints and tips, weekly at most.

Browse my articles, two of the most popular are:

<https://www.clareteachingdogs.com/post/talking-about-dopamine>

<https://www.clareteachingdogs.com/post/why-adding-structure-to-a-training-session-helps-your-reactive-dog>

## How are you feeling?

I'd love to know how you feel after reading this book. Why not drop me a line or leave some feedback here <https://forms.gle/gF3YeosAv6z4robS8>

Enjoy your dog and speak soon

*Clare*