



# USING TREATS

We receive emails from time to time asking us about using treats for training.

Clickers and treat training are very popular. They are a non-physical, reward-based system that can produce results. Many dogs do great with these kinds of training. These systems, however, are a human system, not a canine system and, as such, can sometimes create misunderstandings.

Food can be a very powerful motivator for dogs. You can get them to do all kinds of things for a treat. However, Bark Busters doesn't use treats to reward behavior. Why not?

First, we want dogs to think with their brains, not with their stomachs. When we see dogs that have been treat trained, they are watching their owners' hands, not looking in their eyes. We've been told on numerous occasions that "Rover will do anything for a T-R-E-A-T." When we ask how he behaves without the treat, we usually get a laugh and are told, "He ignores us." This is not a surprise because without the treat, there is no incentive for Rover.

Second, if we allow dogs to take food from our hand, it's harder to make them understand when it is not okay to take food from us or from someone else. Problems can occur. What happens when that young child walks by with an ice cream cone or some other enticing morsel? Rover might think he should be allowed to grab it. Where is Rover when it's dinner time? Is he sitting near the table watching you or, worse, trying to get your food?

Third, from the standpoint of canine leadership, pack leaders don't give food directly to the more submissive members. They eat what they want first and then leave the rest for the pack to eat. These pack leaders, however, will take food from more subordinate members. So, what message does Rover get when he's allowed to take food from our hands? He thinks he must be the pack leader because he's taking food AWAY from a submissive member. Dogs always look at situations from a canine perspective, so you must too.

The pack leaders are the ones who make the rules for the pack. If Rover thinks he's in charge, he's less likely to listen when we ask him to do something or tell him not do something.

Fourth, when we use treats, we are actually responding to Rover, not the other way around. He can learn—sometimes very quickly—to manipulate the situation to get what he wants. And we have to respond with the treat or he doesn't behave. Sometimes the result is that Rover will misbehave on purpose so that he gets a treat in order to stop the bad behavior. This is not uncommon, especially if treats are used to "trade" for an item the dog has taken. This again elevates his position in the pack hierarchy.

Fifth, if Rover has been trained with treats, once he learns the behaviors we want, we have to wean him from the treats. Some people have difficulty with this aspect of treat and clicker training. It can prolong the training process as we are actually training Rover twice.

Sometimes, however, we do use treats during training. Treats can represent things that Rover wants to chase, bark at, upset him or excite him. In each of these cases, we want Rover to pay attention to *us*, not to what *he* might be interested in. We substitute treats for items of interest and work to get Rover to focus on us. This can be a very good exercise to help get Rover to pay attention to you.

We also occasionally use treats to help make training a more pleasant experience. If Rover finds a treat in his crate when he goes in there, he's going to associate good things with the crate and he's more likely to want to go into it. We also might use treats as a way to help Rover overcome some anxiety he might have by making a particular situation into a more pleasant experience.



Care must be used in each of these situations so as not to create additional misunderstandings; we would suggest that you work with a trained therapist on those exercises.

We want Rover to respect us and listen to our voice. In order for him to do that, it's important that he views us as the pack leaders, the ones in charge.

The vast majority of dogs are not leaders by nature. They don't want to be the ones in charge. Being the leader can be stressful to a dog whose temperament is more toward the submissive end of the scale. But if we don't display leadership, in ways Rover understands, he has no choice but to assert himself because he knows that a pack must have a leader in order to survive and survival is obviously extremely important to Rover.

We want to communicate with Rover as simply and as clearly as possible. Using treats for training, while being a powerful tool, can sometimes create misunderstandings.

Bark Busters believes we should use treats as their name suggests, as treats just because we love our dogs; not as a reward for behavior.

If you have questions regarding canine behavior or training please contact us. We've trained almost 400,000 dogs and helped change stressful relationships into Happy Dogs and Happy Families.

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