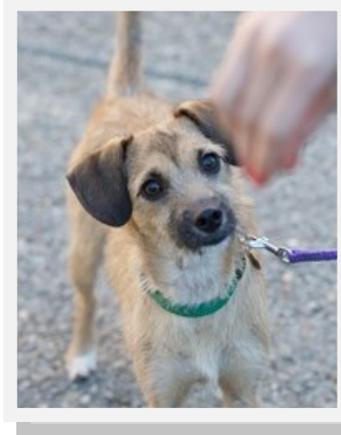




# BEHAVIOR & TRAINING



## HOW DOGS LEARN



Before embarking upon training with your dog, it is important for us as humans to understand how dogs learn. Hundreds of years of scientific research have been put into understanding how “man’s best friend” understands the world and many theories are still being researched and developed!

This handout covers two main principles crucial to understanding how dogs learn! The first was made famous by Nobel Prize winning physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov. Pavlov is responsible for developing Association or Classical Conditioning. Have you ever heard of Pavlov’s dog?

The second principle was developed by B.F. Skinner, an American psychologist, behaviorist, author and inventor. Using a “Skinner Box”, he successfully demonstrated the principle of reinforcement. Read more about these principles and how your dog learns below:

### ASSOCIATION (CLASSICAL CONDITIONING):

When two or more events occur closely together in time, a dog learns that one event predicts the other. If events happen frequently in succession, a dog can then begin to anticipate the second event, and has either a positive or negative emotional response.

Examples of Association: “Mom just opened the treat jar...treats are coming!” (excitement) or “Dad is holding a towel, bath time...time to hide!” (fear/avoidance)

There are two methods to help your dog gain positive association to specific behaviors in order to increase the probability of them happening again. Those two methods are called **positive reinforcement** and **negative punishment**. These are the two methods we use at East Bay SPCA, and we recommend you use at home when training your dog:

<p><b>Positive Reinforcement (+R) - EAST BAY SPCA USES</b></p> <p>When a dog does something we like, we give them a reward. This increases the possibility of that behavior happening again because the dog enjoys the consequence (a treat).</p> <p>Ex) When the dog sits, he gets to enter the dog park.</p>	<p><b>Negative Reinforcement (-R)</b></p> <p>This is when something unpleasant is removed when the correct behavior is performed. This can increase the likelihood of a behavior occurring in order to escape or avoid the unpleasant thing.</p> <p>Ex) When the dog stops eating the houseplants, her stomach begins to feel much better.</p>
<p><b>Positive Punishment (+P)</b></p> <p>This is the theory that adding something the dog does not like will decrease the likelihood that it will continue to happen. However, it means waiting for the dog to do something that deserves punishment instead of rewarding the good behavior it offers willingly.</p> <p>Ex) When the dog barks, he/she receives a collar correction.</p>	<p><b>Negative Punishment (-P) - EAST BAY SPCA USES</b></p> <p>When a dog does a behavior we do not want to reinforce, something it likes or enjoys is taken away.</p> <p>Ex) When the puppy play-bites your hand, you leave the room and end play time.</p>



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## WHY PUNISHMENT-BASED TRAINING FAILS:

In order for your dog to learn effectively, the consequence needs to happen **quickly** and **consistently**. This is the reason most punishment-based training fails to work. The punishment needs to be delivered at the exact moment the undesired behavior occurs. If the punishment is ill-timed then you are giving your dog the wrong information. This mixed message ultimately causes confusion and frustration. Since most punishments end up being inconsistent and sporadic, your dog doesn't learn and only starts to associate you (the common denominator) with negative events.

Another side-effect of punishment-based training is the suppression of normal canine responses like barking or growling. When behaviors are suppressed, new and more concerning behaviors can become the default or regular response. For example, if a dog growls at a stranger, one might want to punish the growl by telling the dog "no!". Next time, the dog doesn't give the warning growl in order to avoid the punishment, but bites the stranger instead. Yikes! You can see how this is dangerous for both the person and dog.

## BEST WAY FOR DOGS TO LEARN:

Research has shown that positive reinforcement and negative punishment are the best ways for a dog to learn. Give your dog something he or she loves when they do a behavior you like (for example, a piece of leftover chicken when they come to you).

Simply ignore the behavior you don't like (turning away when they jump), and reward the behavior you do like (not jumping). This seems like a simple concept, but we often forget to reward our dogs, yet always remember to say "No!" when they are barking or getting into the trash.

Since you'll be giving your dog constant praise and rewards while simply ignoring the unwanted behaviors, your dog will start associating you with positive experiences. You will become a person that provides a feeling of security rather than uncertainty and fear. Instead of waiting for behaviors to punish, you'll be anticipating their successes and your bond with them will grow and strengthen.