



The Learn to Earn Programme

This is the most important part of the behaviour programme and it will provide a solid foundation for training. The idea of this programme is to change the relationship with your dog, so that he/she learns that you are 'top dog', without using any force or aggression on your part. To do this, you need to be in control of all the things that are important to your dog, such as food, toys and your attention. Your attention is very important - dogs are social animals, and soon learn what works to get your attention. If **you** place little importance on your attention, then so will your dog and your place in the pack hierarchy will slip.

Pack structure is not a fixed state and this example is used to illustrate the effects of 'learn to earn' rather than a description of the relationship between you and your dog.

FOOD

Remember that all your dog's food actually belongs to you (after all you went out to buy it!). So, as you would for a child, ask the dog to say "please" before she/he is given food, or indeed treats. You can do this by asking him or her to 'sit', 'down', 'stay', 'shake paws' or any other command that s/he knows, or that you want to teach him/her. The important thing is that your dog does something for you *before* you do something for him or her. It's amazing how quickly dogs learn a whole repertoire of tricks when their dinner depends on it!

TOYS

Like the food, remember that all your dog's toys also belong to you. It's a good idea to keep all of his/her toys in a 'toy box' so that you have control over their use. Just by being in control of a vital resource, like the toy box, will increase your status in the eyes of your dog. You can select toys to give to the dog when you wish, and put them away when you want to. You will probably find that your dog will actually be *more* enthusiastic about his toys when you start this rule. As you know yourself, things that you can't have all the time are much more exciting than things that are readily available. (A holiday in Barbados wouldn't be so exciting if you went there every month!)

YOUR ATTENTION

This is the resource that most people forget to control, and it is also often the resource that dogs want most! Dogs are social animals, and your attention is important to them. It should be remembered that your attention, along with all other vital resources such as food and toys also belong to you. It should be you who decides when to give it and when to take it away.

There are no restrictions at all as to how many times you interact with your dog during the day - in fact the more times the better, **but** it is important that **you** start and finish every interaction.

If your dog comes to ask for attention at other times, he or she must be ignored. This includes eye contact. Although it is sometimes nice that your dog comes to say "hello", for those dogs that are controlling their owners, it is important that such behaviour is ignored in order for your dog to learn the new "rules". To start with when you ignore his or her advances, you will find that your dog's response will be to try harder! Your dog has always got a response from you, and now doesn't get it. This is rather frustrating for the dog, who will do its particular "attention seeking" behaviour more, or even new behaviours to try and get your attention. This can be very, very difficult to ignore, but **it must be ignored** for the message to get through. Once he or she has given up, and left you alone, call him/her back and give lots of attention and cuddles. It is important to remember that it is not a NO ATTENTION programme, but an 'owner in control of attention' Programme.

As with food and toys, it is also a good idea to ask your dog to say 'please' for your attention also. When you call your dog to you, ask for one of the commands you have taught, such as 'sit' before he/she gets a cuddle.

RULES OF THE 'LEARN TO EARN' PROGRAMME

1. Toys and food *belong to you*, so ensure you are in control of both of these resources.
2. Dogs have to say 'please' in some way to ask for one of their resources, whether it is food, toys or your attention

3. Human *start* all interactions
4. Human *finish* all interactions
5. Ignore all your dog's attempts to start interactions or to prolong interactions

The other rule that we mentioned, which is also good to remember when teaching you dog new commands and tricks is to 'reward behaviours that you want, and ignore behaviours that you don't want'. Following this rule will mean that behaviours that you want will become more frequent, and other behaviours will decrease in frequency.

The Learn to Earn Programme is essential to many behaviour modification programmes, particularly where dogs are controlling situations, or showing attention seeking behaviours. It is therefore, very important that you understand the principles of the programme in order to improve the behaviour of your dog. If there are any aspects that you do not understand please do not hesitate to contact our Clinical Animal Behaviourist Judith Adams MSc., on 07989 158 974