TRAINING WITH CONSISTENCY

Dog trainer and German Shepherd lover Suzanne Clothier writes about the seven Cs of dog training: Creativity, Consistency, Communication, Congruency, Condition, Clarity, and Confidence.

I'd like to address one of these Cs: Consistency. Consistency is defined as conformity in the application of something, typically that which is necessary for the sake of logic, accuracy, or fairness.

When working with dogs, I find consistency to be something they understand very quickly. If you always react the same way to the same situation, your dog will learn. This can be good or bad depending on what your dog is learning and who is teaching him.

Example 1: You teach your dog to sit, and every time he sits, you say "good sit" in a pleasant tone of voice. Pretty easy; he expects verbal praise and understands it.

Example 2: Every time your new puppy runs at, and jumps on, your 8 year old child they giggle. The puppy's behavior of jumping on the child is reinforced. If the child tires of this behavior because the puppy is now larger and starts crying instead of giggling and you scold the puppy, the puppy is confused.

Example 3: You teach your dog a silly trick like "roll over." Every time he does it successfully everyone laughs and claps their hands. The dog loves to roll over. In the future, if he knows that you are upset about his behavior, he rolls over, waiting for your positive response.

Foster dogs come into my home and sleep in their crates, from the very first night until they are adopted. When they move to a new foster home or are adopted, they are already crate trained and fully understand that is where they sleep at night. If the new home uses the crate, the dog is already accustomed to it and his behavior won't change. If the new home decides to let the dog sleep loose, the dog understands that at this home he doesn't need to be in his crate. The behavior changes when the humans change it.

If the dog is taught to join you on the couch when you invite him, he will learn to ask politely. If your teenager doesn't care how the dog acts, the dog will behave accordingly. He will learn that when the teenager is on the couch he can jump all over him. So if the teen is eating pizza and the rambunctious dog causes it to get flipped off his plate, the end result is the kid getting mad at the dog for behavior he allowed.

Whether you have a puppy or a new-to-you rescue dog, it is best to start immediately reinforcing your expectations and the boundaries you want your dog to have. Start off by teaching them the things you want them to do and do not waiver. React the same way every time and use the same commands. I run into families all the time where the members are all using different commands for the same action. The dog learns that no one knows what they are talking about. This causes them to stop responding or only respond to one person, the one who is most consistent.

Karen Oliver

Bring Rover Over