

Click a Trick for Fun

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Kids can have loads of fun clicker training tricks. This is a fabulous way to help build a safe and loving kid and K9 bond.

Setting aside a few minutes in puppy classes for trick training is fun and rewarding. After parents have laid the groundwork by teaching the puppy that a click means a treat is coming with the treats out of sight, the kids are ready to step in. Using the clicker is a safe hands-off way for kids to get involved that improves problem solving skills. If the puppy is large, or grabs the treats, or the child is nervous, the child can just toss the treat to the ground rather than handing it to the puppy. Kids and parents need to understand that there will be no correcting the puppy; they can just ignore behaviour that is unwanted. Here are a few favourite tricks that are easy for kids to teach.

Shake a Paw; Wave; High Five– The puppy should sit reliably allow his paws to be touched. The child asks the puppy to sit, then the parent takes the puppy's paw in a handshake. The child clicks and treats. After two or three tries the child can take the paw and click-treat. Soon the puppy will start offering the paw when the hand comes to take it. At this point the child can start saying "shake a paw" while extending a hand and then fade the hand signal. This trick can be modified to a wave and a high five with help from the parent who helps introduce the new hand movements needed for this, while the child clicks and treats. Having the parent introduce the new hand movements helps prevent the child from being scratched while the puppy is excited or frustrated with learning something new. Wave and high five are not suitable if the puppy's paw can reach the child's face.

Chase Your Tail – Some puppies do this naturally – and the child can capture the behaviour with a click and treat and then add a voice command. With long-tailed puppies, the parent can shake the tail gently so that the end is near the puppy's face and for many puppies the chase is on! For puppies with short tails, a target can be used to induce the spinning behaviour. With children a large target is best – a margarine lid taped to a long bamboo stake used to support house plants for example. Parents can elicit the spin using the target while the child clicks and treats. The target can be faded by cutting the margarine lid smaller.

Bang You're Dead – This is a favourite with boys. The parent can ask the puppy to lie down and then use a lure or the target to get the puppy onto his side. The child click treats as soon as the puppy is on his side. The time that the puppy must stay on his side before the click happens is lengthened

incrementally until the puppy will maintain this position for 3-5 seconds. The hand movement used with the lure or target becomes the hand signal for “lie down and roll on your side”. The child can change this to a signal with one finger pointed and change from a sweeping movement to a pointing movement. Adding the words “bang you’re dead” completes the trick.

Say Yes or No – The target can be used to cause the puppy to shake or nod his head. Again parents can help to initiate the movements using the target while the child clicks and treats. A cue phrase can be introduced, “Do you love me?” for yes, “Will you behave?” for no – or anything with different sounds so as not to confuse the puppy. The target can be faded and transferred to the voice command. As a variation, subtle hand signals can be created for yes and no and then the puppy can answer any question.

If lures are used to elicit behaviour, these should be faded out after 2 or 3 tries. The child does not need to be in a big rush to fade out the clicks and treats, however. The more reinforcement the trick gets, the stronger it will be. Once the clicker is faded out, the tricks can be rewarded occasionally with just a treat. Tricks are such fun that the behaviour itself becomes rewarding – for both child and puppy. Clicker training helps build a strong bond of trust between child and puppy and gives the child the knowledge and confidence to handle the puppy without needing to resort to tugging or yelling or other forms of coercion that could lead to conflict and a possibly dangerous situation as the puppy grows up.

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