

# Bendigo Obedience Dog Club

## Training Tip 4; Rewards & Reward Timing



Rewarding your dog during the training phase is very important to reinforce the behaviour you are wanting to teach/train. We want to “pay” our dog for a “job” done right. When we do this, the behaviour is strengthened, making it more likely to be repeated by the dog.

If you think about a child learning -if the child says “I want...” and doesn’t get a response or what they have asked for, but instead says “can I please have...” and gets a response and what they have asked for....which one are they going to learn to use in the future?.... It is the same learning process in our dogs. If we react/reward the behaviour that we do want/expect from them, they will learn to offer this next time.

### What can be rewarding to your dog?

- Verbal/Sound marker (eg. Yes/clicker—this is usually followed up with a food reward)
- Food (this is what most people automatically think of)
- Touch (eg. Pats)
- Play (eg. Tug)
- Action (eg. The dog gets what it wants such as going over to sniff the tree)

Depending on your dog, it may have a preference of one (or more) types of rewards over another type and even different types of things within the same category (eg. Is sausage better than cheese or is the squeaky toy better than a tug?)

We recommend experimenting and exploring all of the above reward methods to handlers when a new dog joins the family. Not only does it teach you how you can reward your dog best, but also helps develop the beginnings of respect and teamwork between you and your dog—yes it is teamwork....remember....the dog always has a CHOICE to do what you are asking of it!

### Reward Timing:

No matter what type of reward we are using, the timing of rewarding the dog is very important as we are teaching the dog what the “right” decision/behaviour is. We want to reward as close to the exact moment we get that right decision as we can so that the dog associates what it is doing with getting that reward.

If we get the timing wrong or too long after the behaviour, the dog will not associate the reward with the behaviour, but what it was doing at the time the reward was given.

Let’s take walking with a loose lead as an example. If the dog stops pulling and tension has gone from the lead, this is when we want to reward the “good” behaviour (ie, not pulling). If we miss this timing and are too slow, we may end up using a verbal/marker reward of “yes” (or a clicker) once it has started to pull again....woops! We have just told the dog that pulling is what we want!

This is why timing of our rewards, no matter what type of reward is being used is critical.

**Remember: As we strengthen a behaviour our dog does, the chance the dog will offer it again increases. With good reward timing we can keep encouraging this to happen more and more often until it is habit.**