

Dog: Touch/Target



Benefit

Teaching your dog the touch/target command means you can distract her from things you don't want her to focus on and get her attention in situations that could be dangerous. You can also get your dog to touch an item or a person she might be a bit frightened of because this command instills more confidence in your dog.

Note: This exercise can be done either standing or sitting. If you are tall and have a small dog, you might want to use a target stick instead of your hand to spare your back. You can make a target stick out of a wooden paint stirrer or spoon. Color one end a visible color to dogs such as blue or green. Or you can use the "click-stick," a target with an integrated clicker.

What You Need

- High-value treats like chicken or cheese or a favorite toy.
- A clicker, if you use one. Otherwise, say "yes!" to mark the behavior.
- A quiet area without distractions to practice in.
- 5 minutes 2–3 times daily.

How to Train It

Step 1. Hold an empty hand out at your dog's nose level. Hold your treat hand behind your back. As your dog's nose touches your extended hand, immediately give the treat from the hidden hand.

Step 2. Repeat this sequence several times: Hand out; your dog touches with her nose; you give her a treat from the hand behind your back.

Step 3. Next, put your hand out and say "touch" or "target," when your dog touches your hand, give her the treat. Repeat this sequence several times: Hand out and voice command; your dog touches with her nose; you give her a treat from the hand behind your back.

Step 4. Once your dog is responding well with your hand in front of her, start moving your hand around to different positions. Start out with small distances from your dog's nose and expand from there.

Tips and Pitfalls

- It varies from dog to dog how long it takes to make the connection that touching your hand makes a treat appear, so be patient. If you or your dog is getting frustrated, take a break. Practice a few simple commands she already knows and reward her for following those commands.
- If your dog shows no interest in your outstretched hand, smear some tasty food on your palm to encourage her to investigate.
- Wait for your dog to touch your hand; don't move your hand to touch your dog.