



Building behaviour with markers

This guide is the very first step in your training journey.

Marker-based training is a simple, force-free way to help your dog understand what you want and to build clear communication from the start. These early games create the emotional foundation that makes all later learning easier, whether you're working on recall, looking to go into advance sports, or creating calmness and every day good manners.

Getting started

Marker-based training is one of the simplest ways to help your dog understand what you want. A marker is a short sound or word that tells your dog the exact moment they've done something right. It becomes a clear bridge between their behaviour and the reward that follows.

You can use a clicker or a word such as "yes". Most people find a word easier to start with, especially when managing leads, treats and a lively dog. The aim is to build a strong, positive association with that sound so your dog feels confident and ready to learn.

The "yes" game

Drop a small piece of food on a clean surface or a little mat. As your dog goes to eat it, say "yes" in a clear, neutral tone. Then drop another piece. Keep the sessions short and cheerful. Ten repetitions, a few times a day, is enough.

Avoid asking for sits or waits. This isn't obedience work. It's simply helping your dog learn that the word "yes" predicts something good. Once they understand, you'll notice their eyes brighten and their expression change the moment they hear it.

Early recall foundations

If you have a whistle, practise blowing three short pips. If not, use the word "here". In the garden, with your dog close by, give the whistle or word and drop a small handful of food between your feet. Point the pieces out so they don't miss any. This builds a positive association with coming close to you, which is the foundation of a reliable recall later on.

Why this matters

These simple games create the emotional groundwork for all future training. They help your dog feel safe, confident and ready to learn, whether you're working on recall, calmness or everyday manners. A few minutes a day is enough to make a real difference.

Don't forget to come back when you're ready for the next phase in your training journey: www.paws4me.co.uk

Why not use your phone and a simple stand to record short clips of your dog's training? It's a great way to look back on their progress, notice small improvements and keep your sessions consistent. Most owners find it encouraging to see how quickly their puppy grows in confidence.