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Teaching Target

Lesson description: Your pet will learn to approach and touch your hand/wand or other object. Targeting is a foundation behavior for clicker training. Once your pet understands how to target the possibilities for new behaviors are endless.

Learning goals: A simple behavior, such as targeting, can be useful to teach new behaviors. The introduction of distractions in a slow and controlled way allows the pet to be successful. You will also develop an understanding of what is distracting to your pet. Additionally, you will experience the powerful role reinforcement plays in building and strengthening behavior in the face of distractions.

Caution: In this plan I am using a hand. If your pet bites, it would be best to teach them to target a target stick/plastic mixing spoon/fly swatter/spatula- something other than your hand. You may also want to use a protective barrier by placing the pet behind a gate or in a cage.

Training plan:

1. Your pet learns to touch a target with its nose and handler adds a cue.
 - a. Present your hand directly in front of the animal's nose, an inch or two away. Click the instant its nose touches your hand and then give a treat. Repeat two or three times.
2. Next hold your hand to the left or right of the animal's nose, still very close, so it is easy to touch with its nose. Click the instant the animal touches your hand, then treat.
3. Gradually move your hand an inch or two to either side and click and treat (c/t) when the animal's nose touches your hand.
4. Then move your hand up an inch or two and click and treat when the animal's nose touches your hand.
5. Begin to vary the position of your hand, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right, slightly up, slightly down. C/t all successful interactions. Once your pet is reliably touching while stationary move on to step 6.
6. Gradually hold your hand farther away so the animal has to move a step or two to touch your hand.
 - a. If the animal doesn't move toward your hand, return to the step where your pet was successful and practice.
7. Add a cue such as "target." The cue should be verbalized just prior to the behavior being performed and right before the click (the click marks the behavior).
8. Once your pet understands the cue and is successful in a distraction free environment proceed to the next step.
 - a. Repeat outside and in new locations.
 - b. Repeat in all locations and add distractions slowly.
 - c. Repeat with a sticky note on your hand or target object.
 - i. Transfer sticky note to new objects.

Things to consider:

- Before proceeding to the next step make sure your pet is very enthusiastic about targeting and should have a 80% success rate at that step.
- How will you introduce greater distraction while still managing the environment so **your pet** is successful?
 - Slowly introduce distractions at a distance and use a higher value reinforcement
 - Keep rate of reinforcement high
 - When using a sticky note, make gradual approximations until your pet understands the concept.

Other games to play with targeting:

Targeting is a very useful foundation behavior. Think of all the possibilities of putting a sticky note on your hand, transferring the cue to the note, and putting the note on other objects.

The possibilities are endless and include- teaching a pet to walk on a leash, entering a crate or other “scary” place, shutting cabinet doors, and turning off and on light switches to name a few.