

This activity was adapted from one created by the Anti-Cruelty Society

Teach campers the importance of positive reinforcement and help shelter dogs with socialization and obedience training!

Materials

- One clicker for every two campers

Activity

- Explain the importance of positive reinforcement in training animals.
- Explain that using a sound (like a click) right before giving a treat is a quick way to teach a dog a desirable behavior, like sitting.
- Tell campers that they are going to practice clicker training with a human partner before working with a dog (under the supervision of a staff member).
- Instruct campers that clicker training is about shaping a desired behavior through approximations. In other words, it's a lot like the "Hot and Cold" game: Every time the person/animal does something that is close to the desired behavior, the trainer must immediately click the clicker and give a treat.
- Have one camper from each partnership step outside the room with an adult. They are going to act as a dog learning a new trick.
- The campers who are left in the room will be the "trainers" and need to come up with a behavior they want their partners to do when they return. Note: It should be a regular, appropriate human behavior such as sitting, standing on one leg, clapping hands, etc.
- Invite the campers representing dogs to come back into the room and start moving around in an attempt to figure out the desired behavior.
- Campers acting as trainers should click and treat (give a high-five) each time their person comes close to doing the desired behavior. For example, if the behavior is clapping hands and the person puts his hands together, the trainer should click once and give the person a high-five. The trainers and "dogs" should not talk at all during the exercise.
- When the person acting as the dog finally does the exact desired behavior, the trainer should click, treat and give verbal praise.
- Have campers switch roles and repeat the activity.
- When students are ready, a staff member can introduce a shelter dog approved to work with children and help the students teach the dog a new trick with clicker training!