

# Correcting Your Dog

Correcting a dog when he does not understand why he is being corrected only leads to an apprehensive canine that is not open to new learning. It is difficult for a dog to have an open mind for instruction in the classroom when he is afraid that he'll be mugged and, because no solution has been provided, does not know how to prevent negative consequences. He must understand what undesired behavior caused the negative effect and be able to offer the desired behavior in order to prevent corrections.

No dog lover would ever thrash a dog intentionally for no reason. However, quite often an owner knows why he punished the dog, but the dog does not have the foggiest idea of what behavior caused the negative effect. A dog that cannot fully understand how to avoid the corrections will typically become afraid of trying and thus lack

effort. Why bother trying if he cannot succeed? Or the dog will become case-hardened and will endure more and more correction. Either an apprehensive or a case-hardened dog is not a protégé that will enjoy training and develop into a blue-ribbon performer that responds to commands/cues with excellence and tail-wagging enthusiasm.

In my training clinics, on my videos, and in my articles, I have tried to

stress the fact that dogs learn by association and by cause-and effect. How a dog perceives a particular cause and effect will determine his reaction to circumstances he views as being similar to those in the past. If a new learning situation is not an *exact duplicate* of a past experience, then it is perceived by the dog as being new. The dog has to guess at how to solve the new puzzle because he has no known

solution to solve the puzzle. If the dog's attempt at trying to solve the new challenge is met with a negative effect, the dog may approach every learning situation with fear and trepidation.

Even if the dog's solution is not what the trainer wished for and the dog is met with a harsh effect because of it, the dog may lose confidence and become afraid of trying. In the initial stages of teaching a dog anything new, it is imperative to be a mentor first to guide the dog to help it understand.

**D**ogs speak dog talk, not people talk. If I adopted a child from a foreign country who did not speak or understand my language, and I instructed the child verbally to go to bed, the youngster would not have a clue how to comply. If the child was punished for not obeying me, I certainly would not be building confidence or respect. It would be the same if an owner commanded, "Whoa," "Here," "Kennel," "Leave my shoes alone," or "Stay off the couch." The dog hears, "Blah, blah, blah" and has zero comprehension

of what the words mean or what is expected of him. If the dog is then corrected, he will not be able to associate the cause with the effect.

A good trainer is a mentor and a teacher *before* being a disciplinarian. The dog must be taught what a command means, what he is expected to do when that command is given, and taught a solution before he can be corrected for not making an effort to comply. Timing is everything. Dogs live in the moment. If a dog messed on the floor and was corrected two hours after the incident, he cannot make the connection that the punishment (result) came from his action of messing on the floor (cause). The punishment is "out of the blue" in his perspective.

Avoid the landmines of negatively correcting your dog by adhering to the following guidelines:

- Be sure that your dog understands what is expected of him. Show him a number of times by being a mentor. One of the biggest mistakes novice trainers make is that they do not help their dogs succeed. A repetition of guiding the dog toward

success develops excellence.

- Dogs do not understand concepts. Break down the tasks into a series of sub-parts, develop a solid foundation, and build on tasks already learned.
- Dogs are time-conscious. A dog's life is a series of Kodak moments. He associates cause and effect within a short window of time.
- Give the dog feedback. It is important to let the dog know he is doing the right thing as well; don't just train via a program that weighs heavily on the punishment side. A good trainer does not scrimp on the paychecks for a job well done. 🐾

Check out George's video training series, available from *The Pointing Dog Journal's* Video Library. The series covers everything you need to know to take your pointing dog from a pup to a finished hunter. For more information on The George Hickox School of Dog Training for Owners and their Dogs, and their pointers and Labrador retrievers, check out [www.george-hickox.com](http://www.george-hickox.com).

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