

SHAPING

Shaping: A positive motivation, hands-off approach to reinforcing behaviors and cues.

Vocabulary:

Bridge word: a special word said at the moment of a desired behavior.

This word 'bridges' the moment of the behavior you are trying to reinforce to the treat you will deliver shortly after. Examples of bridge words: great, super, ta da, score.

BT: short hand used in this instructional sheet. Stands for bridge/treat. Implies you should say your bridge word and treat.

Cued behavior: one that has a command associated with it, like come or sit. This differs from a behavior that we reinforce with BT but don't necessarily have a command attached. Example, I reinforce my dog for sitting calmly in the car while dogs walk by. I don't have a command for this behavior.

Process:

To teach a cued behavior:

1. Witness the behavior and mark with BT. Capture the behavior and BT a number of times.
2. When the behavior is predictable, name or cue the behavior as the dog exhibits the behavior, then BT.
You may want to refine the behavior at this stage, like lengthening duration of eye contact or including the sit and collar grab as part of the recall.
3. Cue the behavior before the dog offers. Minimize distractions. BT.
4. Proof the command against distractions. BT.
5. Sometimes reward with praise and play instead of BT as you try to introduce an intermittent reinforcement schedule.