



Please Don't Squirt Me!

By Vicki Wooters

Dog training, like most things, has truly evolved over the last decade. The days of smacking a dog with a rolled up newspaper are for the most part gone. But, how different are some of today's techniques, and more importantly, do they work?

While at first glance it may seem like there are endless ways to teach a dog, actually there are just a few. The first is in fact punishment. Over the years the punishments have changed to seem less offensive. But punishment is still punishment. These would include smacking a dog, jerking his leash, squirting him, a verbal reprimand, electronic collars and fences, shaking, throwing something at him, etc.

While punishment may sometimes work, I wonder how often it is really needed. Why do trainers tell us to do these things to our dogs? For me, a good rule of thumb would be to do first do as little punishment as possible and then as much as necessary to get the job done.

But, is it possible to avoid punishment altogether? Yes, actually and most times with better results. For example, let's look at it from the view of the dog. Here is little Rex, a Terrier mix recently rescued going for a walk with his new owner. He is new to this area, smelling new smells, seeing new sights, and then he sees a big-pointy-eared dog. This dog looks very similar to the dog that used to pick on him in his old life. Although Rex is frightened, he wants to appear brave to keep that bully away from him and his person. All attention is focused on that imminent danger looming just ahead. Then, boom! Out of

nowhere his person yells at him and squirts him in the face, the eyes. So he may think that maybe he wasn't brave or tough enough. The perceived danger was proven, so will he need to try harder next time to scare the bad dog away?

If this story seems familiar to you, then you and your dog might be candidate for reward-based positive training. Reward based training is another way to train your dog. By rewarding something good, and minimizing or ignoring the undesirable behaviors, what we do not want will actually extinguish.



Vicki Wooters has been successfully training and evaluating dogs for most of her life. She has earned AKC, Schutzhund and police titles & certifications in obedience, tracking, agility, temperament and search and rescue with the AKC. She is a certified Pet Dog Trainer and a behavior counselor. Vicki writes articles for several magazines and is featured in numerous books. Contact Vicki at vicki@phillyfitmagazine.com.

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