

Key Concepts We Wish To Convey in See Tag And Reward (STAR) Sessions at DV Shelters



Clicker Training concepts (how much is stressed varies with age level – the top 3 are required)

Why: *Training is the vehicle for all other concepts* – it provides quick feedback to the training child, requires focus, problem solving and empathy to be successful. Children view becoming a dog trainer as a positive thing, and worth working for.

- The clicker is not a remote control – it is a signal that marks what you want EXACTLY at the moment that it happens
- Every click = a treat, even if you goofed
- It's not a contest – if the dog is having trouble understanding what to do, a good trainer makes the problem just a little easier.
- Practice sessions for a particular thing are short, but you can repeat it later
- Stop while the dog is successful.

Personal Empowerment

Why: DV kids have not had much control over what happens to them. They need practice in making choices confidently.

- There are always choices.
 - Safe choices are provided throughout the session, and the child's choice is honored.
 - If a child chooses an action that violates the Trainer's Promise, the action is stopped and the child is asked which of the promises this breaks, and what could we do instead.
- It's OK to say no
 - When training a new game, a good trainer always gives the dog a choice to do it or not to do it. AND the trainer can tell when the dog says "no, that makes me scared", or "no, we've done that too much and I don't want to do that anymore", or "no, I don't feel good right now."
- Nobody likes to be touched without permission – not you, not the dog, not anyone.
 - "A good trainer asks the dog's permission before petting – and then let's the dog show him what kind of petting it likes."
- You don't get to pick what someone else likes, and they don't get to pick what you like
 - One of Eli's favorite things is cauliflower.
 - Which would you like to be your "puppy treat", ___ or _____?
- Using a clicker may feel weird, let's do some warm-ups!
 - Silly drills to develop dexterity, attention, speed – and ultimately self-confidence in using the clicker.

Clear Communication

Why: Reinforce good eye contact, clear voice when speaking.

- Everyone gets confused when there are too many bosses – know when to back off
- You can get a good idea what a dog or a person is feeling by watching their body language for clues
- Sometimes your how you move or speak can make others (dogs, humans) think you mean something that you don't.
 - “Not all dogs have had a happy life – what might the dog be thinking when it sees this big hand coming down toward his head?”
 - “We think we’re showing love when we give a dog a hug, but do you know what that means in dog-language? I AM THE BOSS OF YOU! Why would we ever want to say that?”
 - Description of what hard eye contact means to a dog vs. to a human.
- A good trainer makes sure that all signals they give the dog (either with their voice or their body) are clear and easy to understand.
 - Let’s practice on each other first, so we don’t confuse Eli.

Safety Planning

Why: DV kids IN PARTICULAR need to have an escape plan. Most women return to their abuser several times before making a final break. This means that the DV staff tries to make sure that everyone has a safety plan for if/when things go wrong.

- Dogs don’t have to love you to know you’re a good trainer and to happily work with you.
 - You listen to what they are trying to tell you
 - You are careful to talk clearly with your mouth and your body
 - You never break the Trainer’s Promises
 - **Kids need “good trainers” too – sometimes this is your teacher, sometimes it’s someone in your family.**
- Everyone needs a safe place to go when they are confused or scared or just need time to think.
 - “This is Eli’s ‘safe place’ – he knows to go there when he needs a break or gets confused

Empathy

- A good trainer pays attention to what his dog is telling him.
- You can get a good idea what a dog or a person is feeling by watching their body language for clues
 - Here’s what Eli’s signals are that he is happy/worried/confused
 - What is Eli telling us right now? What should we do when we see that?
 - You already know people body language, I bet.
 - What am I thinking when I do this?
 - Show me how someone would look if they felt _____?
- Everyone needs a safe place to go when they are confused or scared, or just need time to think.
 - “This is Eli’s ‘safe place’ – he knows to go there when he needs a break or gets confused. What should we do if he chooses to go into his ‘safe place’?”

Problem Solving Skills

Why: DV kids have overwhelming problems, and need to learn skills to work through them in a way that does not include use of force:

- Big problems/projects can be solved if you turn it into small bits that you can tackle one at a time
 - “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time”
- Some problems need more than one person, working together as a team
 - “This is complicated – it’s going to take you guys/us working together as a team”.
- Let’s teach Eli to _____ (some interesting but complicated sequence of skills)
 - “This is pretty complicated – let’s make it easier for Eli. Let’s pretend that this game is a giant puzzle, and break it down into pieces that he can learn one at a time. Then we can put everything together into the whole game! One piece he would need is _____. What’s another piece of the puzzle?”
 - “How is he feeling about this piece of the puzzle.”
 - “Can we put any of these puzzle pieces together yet?”

Non-Violence

Why: DV kids have had recent (and will likely continue to have) exposure to VIOLENT treatment of humans and dogs

- A good trainer does not make his dog afraid.
- A good trainer keeps the TRAINERS PROMISE so the dog trusts him/her
 - You will never ask it to do something dangerous or that will get it in trouble later
 - You will never ask it to do something it can’t
 - You don’t scold it if it tries and doesn’t succeed – just let it try again
 - You make sure your voice and body are giving calm and clear signals
- If a child chooses an action that violates the Trainer’s Promise, the action is stopped and the child is asked which of the promises this breaks, and what could we do instead.
- It is not necessary to use violence to get what you want – there are better ways that are fun for everyone
 - “Training with a clicker is fun for you and fun for the dog – it thinks it’s training you to give it treats!”
 - “A good trainer knows that if the dog is afraid of him or doesn’t trust him he won’t be able to concentrate on learning.”
 - “A good trainer never makes his dog afraid.”

Respect and appreciation for diversity

Why: DV shelter kids are squeezed into a very close living situation with people they don't know with unfamiliar clothes, languages, tastes in food, religious beliefs, etc.

- You don't get to pick what someone else likes, and they don't get to pick what you like
- Dogs are not little people – they are different and isn't it cool!
 - Different sensory input
 - Different ideas of what tastes good
 - Different strengths and weaknesses
 - Different concept of “manners”
 - Different ways of communicating

Self-Control and respect for others' personal boundaries:

Why: Frequently an issue in DV environments

- Dogs don't know WHY you feel things, but they do know WHAT you feel – and they start feeling the same way. A good trainer knows that no matter what else is going on outside the training room, when they are with the dog they need to be calm and happy so that the dog is calm and happy and ready to play.
- Sometimes you/others need to be calm, and sometimes you/others need help to calm down
 - “Eli is getting a little wound up – let's help him calm down a bit.”
 - “All games have rules so it doesn't get too crazy -- Let's help Eli learn to go to the mat before we throw him the ball”
- Nobody likes to be touched without permission – not you, not the dog, not anyone.
- Respect the other members of your team
 - “This is complicated – it's going to take us working together as a team”.
- We take turns
 - “Let's decide who goes first with Paper/Scissors/Rocks”