

# WHY DOES MY DOG IGNORE ME?

Special Report



# Acknowledgements

We give our thanks to the following for their invaluable contributions within this guide:

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# Is “No!” The Most Useless Word In The Canine Vocabulary?

*“The world was conquered through the understanding of dogs; the world exists through the understanding of dogs.”  
~ NIETZCHE*

## About this guide

In this report we will present to you an insight in to a common dog owner's problem.

Why does my dog ignore me is, believe it or not, one of the more popular questions we get asked at K9 Magazine. It's not so much a philosophical query as as “please can you give me advice to help me get my dog to pay attention to me” kind of plea. So, let's do exactly that in this special report.

**This note is important. Information provided in this report is done so on the acceptance that it is not a substitute for veterinary care and treatment provided on a one to one basis by a suitably qualified pet health professional. Our guides are published to give insight, information and useful introductions to a variety of treatments, techniques and methods.**

## “No!” Is This The Most Overused Word in the Dog Owner's Vocabulary?

**No! Non! Nein! Her! No matter in what language you say it, this one word will hold you back when dealing with dogs. And they don't even know what it means! But what they do know is that the sound it makes when coming from your mouth means that you are not happy. And when you are not happy, your dog is not happy. And when your dog is not happy, it is harder to train him. So why beat your head against a linguistic wall? Get rid of the word from your vocabulary and see the results.**

Linguistically, you could argue that the word 'no' is wholly appropriate as a marker to correct undesired behaviours, but what people fail to realise is that by issuing the word 'no', they have not only uttered a word, but their body language will have changed, the tone of voice will have changed, and when dealing with a creature as perceptive as a dog, these non verbal communications will be noted, remembered and disliked. So how do we get around using this ugly, ugly word?

### **Positive reinforcement:**

Positive reinforcement is a popular alternative to the grind and graft of using the word 'no' in training. Many

seasoned dog trainers swear by the agreeable affect that using this method has. In essence, positive reinforcement relies on the trainer not drawing attention to the shortcomings of a dog, but giving hearty consent to the progress, however small, made during the session.

***The theory behind this technique is endorsed by Sara Whittaker, K9's resident training expert***

"The training session needs to remain relaxed and calm for the animal to think coherently about the task at hand. The word 'no' can induce extreme frustration simply by the tone in which it is said, which can block the ability to think and problem solve clearly and rationally.

### **Motivation:**

A little frustration is a good thing when learning something new, as it encourages the animal to try harder, a lot of frustration though is counterproductive as it can make the dog feel grumpy, irritable or stressed, which can make it grumble, start clowning about or give up completely. A little frustration is brought about by the dog receiving nothing for its attempt but with the full knowledge that a reward is on offer should he alter his behaviour.

### **Don't Waste Your Time:**

Many dogs have already learned that the word 'no' is something to be ignored – especially if they hear it all the time. But any response from the trainer can sometimes be encouraging – leading the dog to believe he may be doing something right.

The word 'no' is often more negative for the trainer than it is for the dog. It lends itself to constant repetition i.e. the trainer asks the dog to lie down and the dog sits. The trainer says no, and effectively has to start the whole process again. By the twentieth repeat the trainer is frustrated and thinks the dog is faulty, and the dog is fed up. Better to give a clear verbal signal down, coupled with a hand signal the dog can understand (resisting the temptation to repeat the words and wiggle the hand up and down).

The dog then has a clear position to think about what is required of him. Getting it right like this takes thought from the dog, which means he understood eventually what was required, and it will all happen quicker the next time. No fuss, no irritation – just a simple clear approach whereby everyone stays relaxed.

### **What He Doesn't Know...**

Many novice trainers believe the dog needs to know what he is doing wrong. This just complicates the issue. He only needs to know what he is doing right. If the word 'no' is spoken softly, it will in all probability be ignored. If it is shouted the dog may believe he is in trouble which, depending on his character and personality may make any

further training in that session impossible, or may put him off the task completely. I once had a four year old collie in for training which had never laid down on cue.

The owners also had a six year old collie at home, which had never lied down on cue. As soon as you said the word 'down', he would hunch himself and go stiff. The collie had been to puppy classes where the method of training was very negative – so whenever he heard the words 'lie down' he became very wary as he had associated the word with his frustrated trainer. This was easily overcome using food treats, a hand signal and patience.

### **Pick your battles:**

If you find yourself stuck in a rut, and occasionally referring back to the word, you must take care. If you find that you are going to use the word, make sure you do it in a situation where you can enforce it. If your dog is about to do something that you know you will not be able to stop, saying nothing is better than saying 'no'. If you say 'no' to something that he is debating doing, and he decides not to do it, here is your chance to use positive reinforcement. Make him associate his decision to respond to you with the reinforcement and praise you give him. Better still, resist the temptation all together.

Some dogs do not respond to the word 'no' at all anyway. Any contact with the owner, regardless of the context, is

rewarding. One of my dogs is like this. His name is Bigun and he is big, ginger and fluffy. He loves me more than anything else. Any verbal admonishment from me is received with a 'she loves me' tail wag. So reprimanding is fairly pointless. Dogs like this respond better to remote devices such as bleep / spray collars to break serious bad habits or for less serious issues, teaching them to do something else using rewards. On the other hand, Muttley, another of my dogs only needs to be told once and he has got it! Remember, it is the sound and the accompanying body language that the dog will respond to, not the word.

***Kristina Vourax specialises in training rescued and abandoned dogs. Her organisation, The Dumb Friends League, has been operating since 1910.***

### **It's the way you say it:**

Dog training can be related to raising a small child. If you keep saying 'no' over for everything your child does, they begin to ignore it. It is the same with a dog. If we are always telling the dog 'no' but not telling them what they should be doing, they will begin to ignore the word. The reason I don't use it is because dogs don't understand verbal language unless you teach them. So if I tell my dog 'no', she doesn't understand and has no relationship with that word. It is not going to get her attention to draw her away from the squirrel she is chasing or trash she's eating.

Ask yourself this question. If you want to teach a dog the meaning of a word, you would use association, such as saying ball when you have a ball. How do you show a dog what 'no' is? You can't, which reinforces the notion that dogs do not comprehend abstract thought. A dog will learn what 'cat', 'slipper' or even 'fetch' means. But to him, fetching isn't the act of retrieving an object. It is an action he is praised for doing when he hears the sound of the word. You simply can't explain 'no' to a dog. Especially when you really mean 'stop'.

Using positive reinforcement and telling the dog what to do instead is going to get better results. If I want the dog to not eat trash when I am going on a walk, then I am going to tell the dog to "leave it" rather than saying 'no'. Also, many times when we find ourselves saying 'no', we say it very loud and harsh. This is not going to get a trainer anywhere with their dog. We tend to say 'no' loud and harsh. We also tend to repeat it over and over. This is not teaching the dog anything. We need to stress a trust building relationship with our dogs. And if our dogs fear us because we raise our voice (regardless of the words said), then it will make it harder to train the dog to do good things.

### **The name game:**

We start all of our training by working on the Name Game. This means that the owner starts like the dog has never heard their name before. For a week, every time you say the dog's name, you reward. We use clickers and

treats for this process. The end product will be that the dog turns every time its name is heard because they know it is a good thing. Once an owner has gotten to that point in training, we remind them to say the dog's name and then tell the dog what to do. So if the dog was getting ready to chase a squirrel, we would recommend name and command such as "Bailey, Leave it".

When I very first started as a trainer and was taking classes with my own dog we were visiting my in-laws. My dog, Bailey, was out in the back yard with me. As she was wondering around the yard, a fox started across the back of the yard. Instead of panicking and yelling "no, no" and chasing after Bailey, I was able to call her name, tell her to leave it and come. It really helped to avert a disaster."

The experts have spoken, and we can conclude that 'no' is now a swear word in the house of any self respecting dog owner. So K9 Magazine would like to throw down a challenge to any naughty dog owners who utter this profanity in front of their dog. Get yourself a doggy swear jar, and every time you turn the air blue with this word, put ten pence in the 'no' jar. At the end of the month, take the money from the jar and buy a nice treat for your dog. The next time you think of using the word, you will have a tool for positive reinforcement that will also remind you of how not to speak to your dog.

## Bonus Chapter

### For Some Dogs, a Grunt is Reward Enough!

By [Ryan O'Meara](#)

I was writing an article recently for K9 Magazine, about how to stop dogs begging for food and why treat training (where the owner uses a food treat to 'bribe' the dog in to good behaviour all the time) can often be doomed to failure.

It reminded me of one of my very earliest awe inspired moments with a top, top dog trainer. A HPR man (he trained Pointers and Setters – Hunt, Point, Retrieve dogs).

I stayed at his cottage up in the northeast part of northern Scottish land. In that time, he barely said a word to me. He was, I found out, a quiet type. Suited me.

In the morning when we first went out with his dogs, I had my tiny mind blown at just how adoring his dogs were toward him. From the get-go, he never said a word to them. He silently strode about the moorland with his dogs following him like a supernatural idol. They really did think he was God. I may as well have been invisible. These dogs never paid me even the most minute glance. HE was IT as far as they were concerned.

He put his dogs to work, using whistle commands only, and I got a great lesson. Less, in the way of noise, is more when it comes to dogs.

In the afternoon we did some actual training on a young dog (8 months old).

What struck me was the reward part of his process. A soft grunt, a very light touch under the dog's chin and BOY that was enough for that dog to just melt.

I had to ask: "Is that it?" "That's all you do to reward them?"

"Yes. At this age, they know when they've done good." "When they're very young puppies, I'm a little more animated."

I imagined his version of animated is probably quite different to mine!

He did explain to me that constant white noise in the dog's ear is the enemy to getting sharp, decisive response from the dog.

He went on to give a description of two teachers and their different approach to the same pupils.

Teacher one comes in to the class. The students are rowdy. The teacher quietly tells them to be quiet. They ignore him. He raises his voice slightly "quiet people". They ignore. He raises his voice some more. No response. He eventually yells. He gets a reaction.

What did the class learn?

Teacher 1 only 'means it' when he yells. The first few instructions were just ineffective warnings.

Teacher 2 comes in to teach the same students.

The class is rowdy.

He tells them to please be quiet. They ignore him. His response is to immediately walk around the class and hand detention slips to every pupil who had not listened to his instruction. Quietly, never raising his voice.

Guess what? The teacher who yelled, ultimately, had nowhere further to go. He'd reached his limit on the warnings. The quiet teacher didn't need to get animated. He made a request, it was ignored, he took action and

issued an immediate consequence. In future, when teacher 2 quietly asks his class to give him their attention, I'd imagine he'd get an immediate response.

My dog trainer friend thought the same way. He made it so his voice was used very economically. When he gave a command, it meant something. When he gave a reward, it meant something.

I've tried to incorporate his methods in the way I trained dogs. To be quiet, to be calm, to reward at the right times but not to make a massive song and dance about it. Fair enough, I do go over and above a grunt in letting my dogs know I'm pleased with them – perhaps I'm just too much of a soft hearted soul not to – but I will always remember the lessons I learned on that Scottish hillside.

Lesson 1: White noise and constant, meaningless jibber jabber will ensure the effectiveness of your voice will wear off.

Lesson 2: If you issue a command that the dog understands and it is ignored, don't issue the command again – that will only teach them that they didn't mean it first time round. Issue the command, then let the dog know you expect it to be adhered to.

Lesson 3: Reward, to a dog, is subjective. If you bring your puppy up on the belief that reward for good behaviour

is a peanut butter covered dog biscuit, then as they get older you may struggle to get them to understand that a pat on the head is just as meaningful. A reward is positive reinforcement for a desired behaviour. That doesn't mean the dog has a reward system based in the same values as our own – otherwise we'd need to be issuing them with six figure bonuses each Christmas for their fine efforts in not destroying our entire house.

Economy of noise. Well timed, meaningful rewards. Willingness to reinforce a command with an action.

Great lessons. Don't be ignored just because you talk too much. Make your words count, your rewards count and always be prepared to take action the first time your dog decides to become intentionally deaf.

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- [www.k9magazine.com/dogtraining](http://www.k9magazine.com/dogtraining) (dog training articles)
- [www.dogtips.co](http://www.dogtips.co) (general canine tips)
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This book has been carefully prepared, researched and edited by a team of canine information experts. Our authors are, first and foremost, passionate about dogs and share a mutual satisfaction in assisting people who are experiencing problems with their pets. Our works have been read by more than 12 million pet owners globally.

