A Tale of Two Training Methods

This exploratory study compared the effects of 2 training methods on the behavioral welfare of pet dogs and the dog–owner relationship. The first method is based on positive reinforcement (appearance of appetite stimulus) and the second on negative reinforcement (disappearance of aversive stimulus). Both training methods are based on operant conditioning, which entails an animal learning that responses to instructions or stimuli have consequences.

This is the first direct observational behavioral study in nonworking pet dogs, as previous studies in pet dogs were based on questionnaires only. This study focused on the dogs’ on-leash behavior and ability to obey the sit command and evaluated the subjects for signs of stress and attentive behavior to the owners. The impacts of the methods were evaluated during advanced training classes to avoid the effects of training novelty and to have more consistency from owners and less confusion from subjects.

The dogs trained using negative reinforcement \( (n = 26) \) showed signs of stress and lowered body postures. Subjects trained with positive reinforcement-based methods \( (n = 24) \) showed increased attentiveness toward owners, as measured by frequency of gazes at the owner. Avoidance behaviors measured were not statistically significant. Further analyses are necessary to assess whether field training results are applicable to home training results. Study results suggested that positive reinforcement-based training is less stressful to dogs and potentially more beneficial for dogs’ welfare and the dog–owner relationship.

Commentary

Training is an important aspect of raising a dog and should enhance the dog–owner bond. This study showed that the training methods used can affect the relationship between the dog and owner. Reward-based training is enjoyable for the dog and positively enhances the relationship between dog and owner. Finding the right trainer is the first step to success. The AVSAB’s How to Choose a Trainer handout (avsabonline.org/uploads/position_statements/How_to_Choose_a_Trainer_(AVSAB).pdf) offers excellent suggestions for owners to ensure that training is an enjoyable learning experience for their pet.

—Sandra Sawchuk, DVM, MS

Source


Treatment for Trichoblastoma

A 2-year-old dog was presented for multiple cutaneous soft fluctuating nodules on the face. The nodules varied in size from 2–9 cm and had grown over the past 30 days. Several nodules had ulcerated. Cytology results from fine-needle aspiration suggested basal cell neoplasia. No evidence of metastasis or systemic disease was identified on staging blood work or imaging. Two cycles of doxorubicin and piroxicam were administered before a second surgical excision to facilitate removal; the tumors decreased in size and were less turgid. All nodules were removed by surgical excision and skin defects closed with rotation flaps. The dog was still disease free after 10 months.

Commentary

Trichoblastomas, common benign neoplasms of dogs and cats, typically occur in animals >5 years of age. The lesions tend to be solitary and found most often on the head, neck, and base of the ear. Although there is no known sex predilection, poodles and spaniels may be predisposed. In cats, lesions tend to occur on the cranial aspect of the body. Initial diagnostics for any ulcerated mass include fine-needle aspiration and impression smears. When obtaining tissue samples of rapidly growing lesions, skin biopsy punches are often inadequate because sample depth is insufficient. When obtaining samples of nodular/ulcerated nodular lesions, excisional biopsy or cold steel wedge biopsy should be attempted. Often these lesions have large areas of necrosis that are nondiagnostic. In addition, if the lesions are caused by a pathogen, it may only be found in the deepest part of the tissue sample.—Karen A. Moriello, DVM, DACVD

Source