

Teacher's Pet Sessions

Training Session 1 – Getting Off to a Good Start

Pia Silvani: Hi. Welcome to *Teacher's Pet* on Pet Life Radio. This is Pia Silvani, director of training and behavior at St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center in Madison New Jersey and your host. This week we'll be starting our new format. In order to give you as much information as possible I will be interviewing well-known guests, authors, lecturers and trainers in the field of animal behavior. We will try to cover as many topics as we can. As a little teaser, some of the topics that we will be discussing over the next few months will be summer noise phobias, selecting the right dog from a shelter, grieving dogs, bully breeds, helping Fido be happy home alone and the emotions of people and dogs, and much more. Please check in each week so you don't miss your favorite topic. If you have a specific topic that you would like me to cover, please email me at pia@petliferadio.com. Now every other week we will be conducting a live training session, so you will need your dog obviously, a bag of treats and a tug toy, so we're going to, actually today we're going to work a little bit on tug. Sometimes we will build on previous sessions, and other times we will work on something new. So before we begin our training session, if you don't have your dog, treats and a tug toy, now's the time to get ready, so go and get them. You will also need a pen and paper handy. We'll take a short break, and when we return get ready to have some fun.

Pia Silvani: Welcome back. This is Pia Silvani, host of *Teacher's Pet* on Pet Life Radio. Thanks for joining us. Today we're going to do our first training session, but lets talk a little bit first about positive reinforcement training. 20 years ago when I started training the methodologies used were quite different than they are today. We never really taught our dogs what the words meant. We simply said a word, such as 'sit', maybe pushed down on the rump of the dog to make him do it, and that was it, and we expected him to know better. Today many trainers still use these methods, but many of us have found better ways, which are more fun, more rewarding to both the dog as well as to us. The key thing to remember however, that positive reinforcement training does not mean permissive. It simply means that the dog is taught to do something, and if he does it correctly he will be rewarded for it. Like people, dogs love to work for rewards and will begin to offer you behaviors in hopes of getting one. Getting rewards will motivate your dog to perform the behavior again and again. The more you reinforce it, the faster the behavior's going to turn into a habit. But be careful not to inadvertently reward the dog for misbehaving. For an example, very popular behavior that dogs do is they get into the laundry basket or they go into your wastebasket and steal a tissue, and it appears that the dog will come to you and show you what he has in his mouth, and all of a sudden everybody starts to chase the dog. What fun for the dog when you think of it from the dog's perspective. So inadvertently

what you're doing is you're reinforcing the dog for taking things. So be careful what you are rewarding. So what is a reward you ask? So many people think it's just food. While food can be one type of reward used, it is not the only reward that you should be using. Rewards are anything that your dog likes. What my dog likes might not necessarily be what your dog likes. So before we get started lets find what your dog's motivational triggers are. On your piece of paper what I'd like you to do now is write down the following topic headings, leaving space for a list of three to five sub categories underneath. Okay, here are the topics. The first one is Play/Toys. Topic two, Real Life Rewards. Topic three, Food Treats. And topic four, Petting and Praise. So again, it's Play/Toys, Real Life Rewards, Food Treats, Petting and Praise. Now under Play/Toys what I'd like you to do is write a number one, and next to that write down your dog's favorite game to play and his favorite toy. For homework, you will write down three or four more games or items that your dog likes, number five being the lowest on the motivational totem pole. Now for example my sheet of paper here in front of me has the following: Number one, Frisbee. Number two, squeaky balls. Number three, fleece braided tug toy. Number four, Find It. And number five, Hide and Seek. Before you play any of your games, ask your dog to do something. Why give it away for free? Sometimes you can do a few freebies obviously; you don't want him to be a robot. But before I take my dog out for Frisbee I'll always practice some 'sits' and 'downs' and have the dog wait, which we will go over here, but absolutely, don't take your dog out every single day and pay for free. This is a good time to practice. Now lets move on to number two, Real Life Rewards. Think of these as places to go, things to do. What does your dog like to do? Put a number one and write down your favorite thing your dog likes to do. Here's my list: Number one, swimming. Number two, hiking. Three, playing in the brook. Number four, a walk. And number five, a car ride. Again, write down your number one and fill in the rest later. Use your real life rewards after you've asked your dog to do something, just like you did with play.

Okay, lets move on. Food Treats is the next category. I'm going to tell you what my list is here for my dog: Number one, I know this might not sound good, but it is liver. Number two, steak. Number three, chicken. Number four, cheese. And number five, turkey. Now you say "Those are all quote/unquote "human foods", I though we're not supposed to feed human foods." Obviously make sure that you check with your vet and make sure that your dog doesn't have any particular allergies, but I've always given real food to my dogs, human grade food, as treats and I've never had a begging dog from the table. The key factor is if you're going to use human food as a food reward, make sure that you're not giving it from the table. Feeding from the table will cause your dog to beg, but simply giving him regular food outside of the context of you eating is not going to cause a begging dog. Now you may need to do a food sampling to know. His regular food might work well as a reward at home or on familiar walks, but it's meaningless to him if he's just eaten a full bowl and now you attempt to use it as a reward around distractions. Most dogs should not be fed prior to any training session, especially if you intend on using food as a motivator or a reward. So think about it, how

stuffed you are after a Thanksgiving dinner. The warm apple pie with homemade vanilla ice cream may not be as rewarding at that time compared to a piece of broiled fish and veggies for dinner, now maybe you might be motivated for that warm apple pie. Okay, lastly, Petting and Praise is the last category. Here's my list: Butt scratches, number one. Number two, cheers. My dogs love when I go, "Woo hoo." And number three, body pats. My dogs have learned that they love when I give them quick little pats on the side of their body. Now some dogs are highly motivated by praise, but most dogs have to be taught to like praise. They learn to like it because typically it's always followed by something good. It could be food, it could be play, could be just you being happy. But if you never linked it with something good, it probably would have a very low value and would be very low on the motivational totem pole.

Pia Silvani: Okay, now that you have those written down, let's talk a little bit about how we're going to mark good behavior. We call this a conditioned positive reinforcer. We need to tell the dog that what he just did is correct and a reward will be following. So we're going to pick a word to use that means you did exactly what I liked and a reward will always follow. Think of it as a contract. I like to use the word "yes". The verbal marker "yes" is used as a predictor or a signal of a reward when it's paired with something specific. And again, reward, that can be anything that's on your list. So remember as you know your rewards are going to be anything that your dog will work for. So for example if you tell your dog to 'sit' and he performs the behavior, so for example, he puts his butt on the ground, the second he puts his butt on the ground you're going to say, "Yes", and follow it with a reward thereafter. Now one of the advantages of having this positive marker is that you can use it at great distances. Now a lot of people say, "Well can't I just use verbal praise instead of "yes". Absolutely. However, "yes" will capture the behavior a lot quicker. So for very quick behaviors, such as releasing a tug toy, which we're going to do today, teaching a 'sit', teaching a 'down', what I'd like you to do is mark it with a "yes" followed by a food treat, so your dog learns to get excited when he hears the word "yes". We're going to use verbal praise, such as "Good boy", "Good girl", for duration exercises. Basically "Good boy", "Good girl" means, "Keep doing what you're doing. You're doing a nice job." Lastly, we need a release word. We need the dog to understand that it's not up to him to decide when the behavior's over, he must look to you for permission for the end of the behavior. So we're going to teach him a release word, meaning, "You're done. Exercise complete." So we're going to use the word "okay". So think of "okay" as exercise finished.

Pia Silvani: Today we're going to be working on several things, and we just got done talking about markers and release words, as well as what rewards are. What I'd like you to do now is have a seat on the floor and get your dog next to you, and I'm doing that right now with my dog. I have two Belgian Tervuren, you see one on the site, that is Gwenny, also known as Gwenever. I also have her father who is nine years old, his name is Lance or Lancelot. They are Belgian Tervuren, which are herding dogs from Belgium, and they are very active working

dogs. So what I'm going to do is one excellent exercise to teach and you can teach this when you get a puppy, it's wonderful to teach your dog when you're just hanging around, is to sit and relax with you when you're on the floor. Many times when you're sitting on the floor, you might be playing a board game with your children, you might be watching television, you could even be exercising, dogs think that's playtime. That's a good opportunity to start grabbing at your clothing, jumping all over you, basically being a nuisance. So instead let's teach your dog when you're relaxing, that's his time to relax as well. So what I'd like you to do now anytime we're between exercises or you can practice this at night when you're watching television, have a seat on the floor and get your dog either between your legs, you can put your dog next to you, wherever you're comfortable, you can lean up against the sofa or a chair, you can just sit in the middle of the floor. Again, the key is that you're relaxing, the dog is relaxing. Get him into a position, if he won't lie down right now that's fine, but I want you to do now is start to massage your dog. And when I talk about massage, I want you to do this very slowly, okay. Use your fingertips only, and start off by your dog's head, okay. Up by his ears, again, you're not scratching, you're not moving quickly, you're just going very slowly, deep muscle pressure, try to get deep into the dog's muscle. You should really go down into his neck area, into the shoulder area, moving down the legs. It should start to relax the dog. If your dogs start to become fidgety or he fusses, just hold him very still, remain calm, don't yell at him, just tell him to calm down and continue on with the massage. If you notice that he doesn't like some place where you're touching, he could be sore in that area.

You obviously don't want to touch in an area if he's having a problem, obviously if you have any kind of aggression, if the dog doesn't like his feet touched and he growls, let's not go there right now. Just find spots where he likes. He should eventually just sort of melt into your arms. And go down his spine, it feels really good to the dog too. Almost take your fingertips and go on each side of the spine. If any of you have gone to a chiropractor, you know how good that feels. All right, as you're doing that, and this can be an exercise that you can do any time that we're in a training session in between exercise. I'm going to talk a little bit about taking treats gently. Treats are a reward. They shouldn't be given for free, nor should the dog grab them out of your hands or take half your hand with the treat. So what you're going to do now is stand up, and get your dog up. You can tell him, "Okay", give him a little body pat. And I want you to take a couple treats and put them in your hand. So place one treat, and your treat should be small... When we talk about treats, I don't want large treats, so if you have large treats I want you to break them down. Take a look at your fingernail. Basically your treat should be half the size of your fingernail, and that does not matter what size dog it is. If you have a really tiny dog, a petit dog, it just be a tiny little morsel. Remember food treats are about palatability, it's not about the size. If you give them too large of a treat they're going to get full very quickly. So I want you to take one small treat, I want you to put it between your thumb and your forefinger, present it to the dog and say, "Take it." Okay, now if your dog, if you felt teeth on

your fingers, your dog is taking the food obviously too hard. So what I want you to do now then, if that was, if that occurred, take the treat, put it in a closed fist, put your fist in front of your dog's nose, wait for him to lick your hand, now he might be biting it at this point, wait for him to use his tongue to lick your hand for the treat. As soon as he, you feel his tongue licking your fist, say "Yes", open your palm and give him the treat, okay. Take hold of another treat, do the exact same exercise over and over again, so the dog now starts to learn that in order to get the treat he's got to lick and not use his mouth, his teeth. Teeth should never touch people's bodies anywhere under any circumstance. So again, the dog is licking, second you feel his tongue; say "Yes", open and present. As you present, you can say, "Take it." So we're really teaching him a word that means, "Put it in your mouth", and that's going to be used later on when we teach a retrieve. So one more time, closed fist, if he licks, tell him "Yes", present and say, "Take it". Now if he never uses teeth and he took the treat very nicely, you can do the exact same thing, present the treat, tell him to take it and then release into his mouth. Okay, very nice.

Pia Silvani: Alright, let's work a little bit now on teaching the dog tug, and this is a wonderful exercise to do, as well as making a positive association about relinquishing objects. So I like to use the word, either "give", "release", you can say "Gracias", use whatever word you like. I do avoid using the phrase "Drop it." I find that when people use the phrase "Drop it", they say it in a very negative tone, their tonality goes down, it's like their dog has lock jaw and the owner has lock jaw, and it's, "Drop it." So pick a word that you can say in a pleasant tone of voice, even if it's something, the dog has something that he should not have or something of value or something that's dangerous, the key is to say your release word in the calmest tone possible. This will help. So what I'd like you to do now is take your little tug toy out and tease your dog with it. And when I say tease your dog with it, the best way is just to sort of drag it on the ground like it's a snake. But you want to say nothing at this point, don't say a word, don't say "Come on", don't say "Get it", say absolutely nothing, okay. Wait for the dog to place it in his mouth, and as soon as he does, what I want you to do is start a tug game with him, all right. Now you're not pulling up, I want you to pull straight out, so if the height of your dog's head is at your knees, you're tugging at knee level. You never want to elevate the dog into the air, okay. So you're tugging at the dog's head level wherever that is.

For a tiny dog you may need to sit on the floor, okay, and tug very low. Allow the dog to keep tugging. Now what you can do, again, you're not saying anything, you can say "tug" as the dog is tugging, so you're pairing up that word with that particular behavior. So as he's tugging, say "Tug", now we need to get him to release the tug toy. You have two options: option number one, take hold of his collar very gently. So take your fingers, put it underneath the dog's collar from the bottom part up near his neck, okay, hold onto the collar and now stop tugging. Continue to hold onto the object, but don't pull. If your dog starts to pull the object away from you, do not pull back, okay. Instead bring your dog toward you with

your hand in the collar. As soon as he relinquishes the object, tell him “Yes”, and start the tug game over again. So again, option one, once he’s tugging tease him with a toy, wait for him to grab it, hey, if he’s not grabbing the toy you’re going to have to find a different toy. It’s got to be something that your dog likes to take. As soon as he grabs it tell him “Tug”, okay, “Tug, tug, tug”, take hold of the collar, stop tugging, wait him out, be patient, don’t tug, again, if he’s pulling against the object don’t pull back. Now you’re giving him something to pull against. Pull him slightly towards you, be gentle, stay calm. The second he starts to open his mouth, you can now say “Release”, and now you’ve paired the word up. Another way you can do this, if you’re having a difficult time with this what I’d like you to do is keep a piece of food, a reward, up on the table. Get your dog tugging again, okay. Once he’s tugging, what I’d like you to do is take, with your other hand, take hold of the treat, place it right in front of the dogs nose. The second the dog opens his mouth, say “Give” or “Release”, give him the treat and then wait it out. Now once he’s getting into the pattern of relinquishing the object, he should not, rule number one, he should never grab the object until you say “Take it.” If he does, the game ends. Number two, he must always relinquish the object when you say “Give” or “Release”. And number three, if he starts to get carried away by grabbing at clothing and jumping up on you and maybe grabbing your body parts, no accidental misses. Game ends. So basically when you think about it, it takes two to tug. If you’re not tugging, the game is over. So one more time, what you’re going to do is, if your dog is now willingly taking the toy, you can tell your dog to sit and I’d like you to snap the toy out in front of you and say “Take it.” And if he doesn’t take it, tease him with it a little bit and as soon as he does tell him “Yes”, and now say “Tug” as you’re tugging, so you’re both tugging together, praise your dog...

Some people ask, “Well what if he’s, if he’s growling a little bit?” That’s okay, as long as he’s continuing to play. If he starts to get too aroused, stop the game, don’t let him get carried away with it. Now what I’d like you to do, either take hold of his collar or you might need a food treat. As soon as he starts to open his mouth, that’s when you pair it with a word, say “Give” or “Release”, and the second he does, “Yes”, perfect, and you can start your tug game again. So this’ll be a game that you’re going to play, my suggestion is if you have children, you establish the rules first, once the dog understands the rules, then your children can play the tug game, obviously supervised. Both children as well as dog have to follow the rules of the game. So here’s a game that you can use now, this is a great reward for dogs. Tell him to sit and his reward is tug. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a treat. If you tell him to lie down and he does, you can say “Take it”, and now the game of tug will now be the reward.

Pia Silvani: All right, unfortunately for today we’re out of time. If you want more information about the topic that we discussed today, I’ve written six training manuals, which are available for sale through St. Hubert’s Dog Training School. You can send an email to our office manager, Tracy Hofer, at thofer, that’s t-h-o-f-e-r, @sthuberts, all one word, s-t-h-u-b-e-r-t-s, dot org, o-r-g

(thofer@sthuberts.org), and request one of our basic training manuals. Next week we'll have a very special guest on who's a pioneer in her field so you won't want to miss it. A special thanks to our producers for making this show happen. Please go to petliferadio.com and click on *Teacher's Pet*. Also if you have any questions, comments or ideas for shows, or if you have any problems, feel free, email me at pia, p-i-a, @petliferadio.com (pia@petliferadio.com). So until next time, this is Pia signing off, and thank you so much for your interest in Pet Life Radio.

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