



Cue-Response-Reward Interactions

Cue-response-reward is an interaction format that will not only help to teach self-control and strengthen cued behaviors but also teaches your pet to trust you and look to you for guidance. Whether you call it “Sit to Say Please,” “Learn to Earn,” or “Nothing in Life is Free,” these interactions all follow a similar format, although their underlying theories might vary slightly. The format involves the owner providing a cue, the pet responding by performing the behavior, and the pet receiving a reward. If your pet does not do the behavior that you ask, simply continue to ignore the pet and ask again later.

By interacting with your pet in this manner, you are removing any perceived or anticipated confrontation. If your pet cannot do the behavior (whether stressed, worried, or simply does not want to interact), nothing bad happens. The pet can simply walk away. The stress is immediately removed from the interaction and makes you more predictable to

your pet. You will see your pet start to respond faster to cues because it pays off every time pets do what they are asked and interactions no longer have any negative consequences.

Use a reward that is inherently and truly positive for your pet, which can vary from animal to animal. Food is almost always a good option. Some pets do not necessarily like to be touched or petted. If your pet loves to be touched, you can use petting as a reward; but if not, do not use petting as a reward. Another option is playing with toys. For some very social pets, a useful reward can be eye contact or even just speaking to them.

In addition, attention-seeking behaviors should be ignored and casual interactions avoided, which make you more predictable to your pet. Casual interactions include petting or having a conversation with your pet lying on the couch. When your pet approaches you, 1 of 3 things can happen: 1) the pet gets what it wants (petting, food, or other attention), 2) nothing happens (you ignore the pet) so the interaction is neutral, or 3) something the pet perceives as bad, unpleasant, or frightening happens. The negative consequence could be you saying “no, I do not want to pet you right now” or pushing the pet away. For some pets, this response is a devastating blow, but for others, this negative attention is still attention, the goal of their behavior, and an inadvertent reward. Your ignoring attention-seeking and ensuring that you initiate all interactions can result in only a pleasant outcome for your pet because it now knows what to expect from you and can trust you to follow that pattern. **TVP**

Adapted from North Carolina State University learning materials

