

“TOUCH”/HAND TARGETING

This seemingly frivolous exercise actually has many useful applications and is a great activity to get your dog’s mind into work mode. It’s a great relationship builder, too. Targeting can be used to boost the confidence level of a timid dog and help keep a dog’s attention focused on you instead of on distractions. It’s easy to train, fun and dogs love it!

To teach “Touch”:

1. Stand on the dog’s leash so you have both hands free (or work with no leash if you’re in a safe place and your dog isn’t too distracted). If you have a really small dog, you may need to sit in a chair or on the floor.
2. Put a treat in your palm; either hold it there with your thumb or put it in between your fingers.
3. With your palm facing the dog, about 6 inches away from the dog at nose level, say “Touch”. Most dogs will investigate your hand with a nose touch.
4. When the dog’s nose touches your hand, mark with “Yes!” and give him the treat.
5. DO THIS 3 TIMES in a row, giving the dog the treat from the target hand.
6. Then, present the same hand but EMPTY. Say “Touch”. If the dog doesn’t touch your target hand, simply move it a bit, wiggle your fingers, anything to encourage the dog to investigate your hand.
7. When your dog touches your empty hand, say “Yes” and give a treat from your OTHER HAND. Repeat a few times. Most dogs make a quick connection between touching your hand and getting a reward.
8. When you are confident the dog will touch your hand at 6 inches away (basic rule of thumb is 9 out of 10 times), practice moving your hand a bit farther away so the dog has to stretch to reach it. Some dogs are fine with this change, others will need to go more slowly.
9. When this is reliable, refrain from rewarding unless you have given the verbal cue “Touch”. This way the dog learns to touch your hand when requested.
10. Practice moving your hand on different sides of the dog and in different areas of the space you’re working in.
11. Practice in new environments (adding distractions).