

Let's Talk About Choice

Choice...it's a funny word. The definition is "selected as one's favorite or the best". What does this mean for our dogs? Well, it means that choice is something awesome! When your dog makes a choice, they are doing something they WANT to do. If it is not something they WANT to do, then it is by definition, NOT a choice. Let's think about that for a moment. If your dog is jumping on you and it is something they are enjoying, then it is a choice they made. However, if they are sitting because they are forced into that position or they have been punished for making other choices and this is the only behavior that stops the punishment, then that is NOT a choice.

Why does this matter? It matters because we all want dogs who behave how we want them to. We want dogs who sit when they meet people, walk near us when we are out and about, who can pass another dog or person and have manners, and who comes running quickly to the sound of their name. If all of these behaviors are CHOICES your dog makes, then they are happily making those decisions and they are frequent and easy.

Dogs make choices all day long. Unfortunately, many of those choices do not fit into our human value system. For example, when dogs greet, they sniff each other's butts, genitals, and faces. How are they supposed to know that this is not the correct way to greet a human? Many times the dog is punished (pushed down, yelled at, and even kicked or hit) for performing this very natural and normal dog behavior. I'm sure if they understood that giving a little space, offering a paw, and shaking were the correct and desired behavior for greeting humans, they would be happy to make that choice. However, it is not in their DNA. We have to help them learn to make that choice. Personally, I am perfectly happy if my dog chooses to sit for greetings.

Our goal should be to manage a dog's resources so they have limited choices to have to work through. When they make the choice we like, they win that resource. If we always think about training as stopping unwanted behaviors, we take away dog's choices and this causes confusion and frustration...sometimes even aggression.

FUN...GAMES...CHOICE!!!