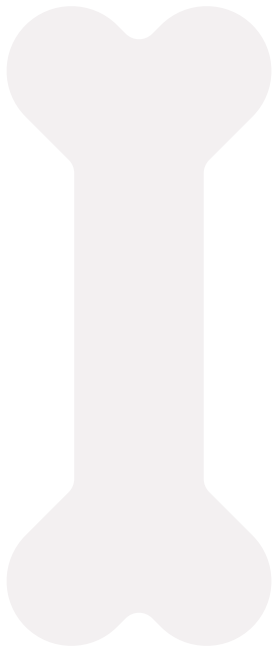


# Using Food in Training

---

## Appropriate Reward Handling



### Why

---

Food is one of the most powerful tools we have to:

- Reinforce desired behaviors
- Motivate dogs to perform tasks that aren't naturally rewarding
- Lure dogs into correct positions during the teaching phase

Training with food helps bridge the gap between what we want and what makes sense to our dogs. It creates clarity and encourages your dog to try harder, even when distractions or challenges are present.

### How

---

#### 1. Choose the Right Food:

Use something your dog is genuinely excited about. The more challenging the task or distracting the environment, the more valuable the reward should be.

#### 2. Don't Let Food Become the Focus:

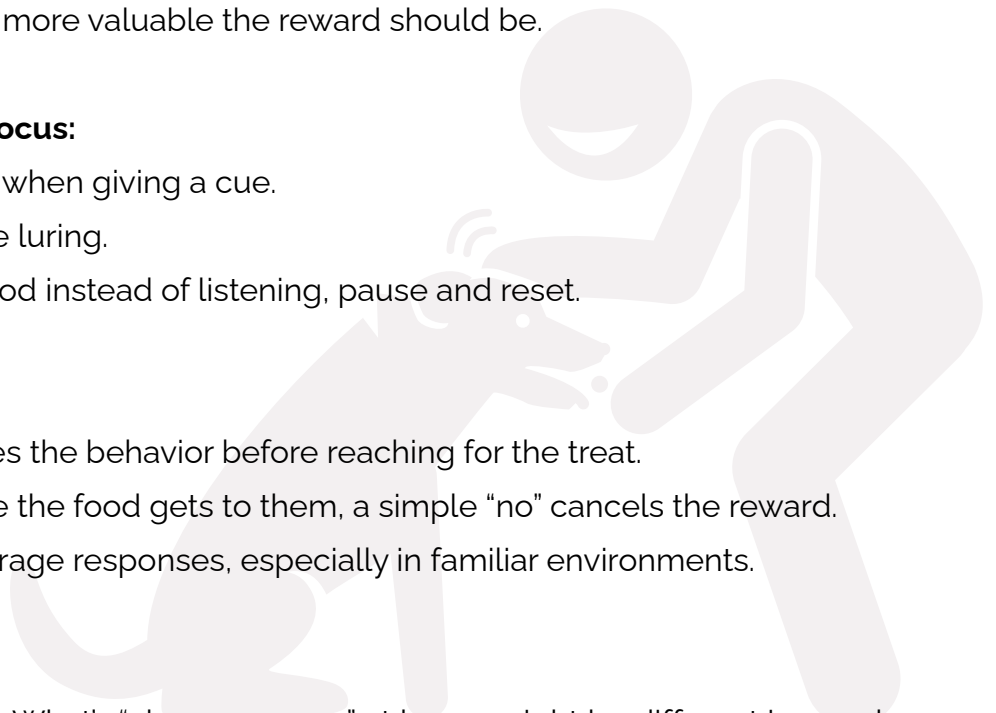
- Keep food behind your back when giving a cue.
- Hide it in a closed hand while luring.
- If your dog focuses on the food instead of listening, pause and reset.

#### 3. Reward After the Behavior:

- Wait until your dog completes the behavior before reaching for the treat.
- If your dog messes up before the food gets to them, a simple "no" cancels the reward.
- Only reward better-than-average responses, especially in familiar environments.

#### 4. Be Consistent, but Flexible:

Your dog's environment matters. What's "above average" at home might be different in a park or around other dogs. Keep your expectations realistic and adjust your support level as needed.



# Fading Out Food

---

## Preventing Food Dependency

### Why

---

Food is a teaching tool—not a bribe or forever requirement.

Once your dog clearly understands a behavior, over-reliance on food can either cause an overstimulated dog or weaken reliability, especially if food isn't always available.

Some behaviors are naturally rewarding (like sitting or laying down), while others (like leaving distractions or coming away from play) are not. Fading food doesn't mean stopping rewards altogether—it means moving toward more meaningful or realistic reinforcement in day-to-day life.

### When

---

You should only consider fading out food when:

- Your dog can perform the behavior 2 out of 3 times without seeing food first, even in different environments outside the home.
- Your dog can perform the behavior 2 out of 3 times without physical guidance, like leash pressure or body prompts.
- Your dog is able to settle and ignore distractions in a variety of real-world environments..

### How

---

Fading food is about building reliability and maintaining motivation—not taking rewards away completely

- Don't fade too early. Wait until your dog performs the behavior 95–100% of the time in that environment before switching to verbal praise.
- Start with only rewarding your dog for their best efforts. Then randomly reward once you reach your goals.
- Swap some food rewards for praise, toys, affection, or real-life rewards (like being released to go sniff or play).
- If your dog is struggling more than 30% of the time with an obedience position, reintroduce a food lure in to help guide.
- Go back a step and practice further away from distractions or for a shorter time around them, when you first eliminate food assistance.
- Keep food available for big wins: difficult tasks, new environments, or impulse control moments.

