

Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:10

SG Sit, down, come, three really popular cues that people use to prompt behaviors for their dogs. But what happens when your dog can't hear those words? What then? Enter the physical cue. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Today I'm going to share with you how people really mess up their dogs when they're teaching physical cues, why it's really important that your dog understand at least some physical cues, and how easy it is to teach your dog physical cues once you know the process.

00:00:43

And first up, what do you mean by a physical cue? A physical cue would be a hand motion or a bo—you can use any part of your body to cue a dog to do a behavior.

Now here's the thing, a lot of times people inadvertently use these physical cues when they're trying to teach their dog a verbal cue, particularly if they're luring a dog.

00:01:07

For example, they'll put a cookie between on the top of their dog's nose and put it over their head while they're saying, "sit, sit, sit", and the physical cue of their hand going over the dog's head actually overpowers the verbal cue because dogs are prey animals. They learn to pick up motion a lot quicker than they pick up on verbal cues.

00:01:31

And so, it may be difficult to get your dog to sit alone if you've been doing sit with a hand motion. Likewise, you might not be able to get your dog to sit on a single sit alone because you've paired those two together. We're going to fix all of that. But first why do we care if our dogs understand physical cues?

00:01:49

The wish for all of us is that our dogs will live to a very old ripe age. And the thing is when dogs get older, a lot of times they lose their hearing. And on top of that, there's a lot of breeds that are prone to lose their hearing and go deaf, completely deaf at a very young age. And so, it's not going to hurt to teach every dog out there at least some physical cues.

00:02:14

And it's so darn easy to do it. Why not? As that dog gets older you might want to add more and more physical cues and less and less verbal cues. Now, if you are somebody who wants to play a sport like the sport of agility there's a lot of cuing that happens with physical cues. Same thing happens, people tend to train the two of them together, which actually confuses the dog and slows down the learning.

00:02:39

But I'm going to share with you today how you can get around all that. First of all, how do we teach a cue? It's a **stimulus** that creates a **behavior** and then that behavior gets **reinforced**. And so, when that dog comes upon that stimulus again, they're going to want to do the same behavior.



Episode: #113

Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

00:02:56

We've talked about here on the podcast [arranging coincidences](#), so we don't have to just wait for our dog to happen upon a spot where they want to lie down.

We [manipulate their environment](#) so that we can predict the behavior they're going to do.

For example, if you go to my YouTube channel there's a video called [Perch Work \(Pivots and Spins\)](#). And there I talked about shaping a dog to first just step onto a blanket.

00:03:22

Now you could teach your dog what we call a Hot Zone - which is go to a bed or a blanket - just with the beginning of this episode. And what the stimulus of the blanket and the closeness of you to the blanket will cause the dog to step on it. And then we throw a cookie off, say the word search, the dog runs into the corner, gets it.

00:03:43

And guess what? They're going to come running back towards you. So, boom! Stimulus creates the behavior: dog getting on the blanket.

Reinforcement means the dog's going to want to repeat the behavior. And you just keep this loop going. You can move away from the blanket until the dog is going on the blanket on their own. And boom, you've got the behavior.

00:04:02

"But wait, Susan. I've not said anything except search for the dog to go and run and find that cookie." Well, now what you're going to do is you're going to make sure that the dog really, really knows it. "No, Susan, I just did like 10 of them in a row." Doesn't mean the dog knows it everywhere.

00:04:18

So, what we have to do is now generalize the behavior before we [add a cue](#). Now that goes against the way most people teach their dogs to do anything.

They babble to them the whole time. Right? "Sit, sit, sit." "Down, down, down."

Like, you know if you ask somebody to pass the salt as they're reaching for it you don't say "pass the salt, pass the salt, pass the salt, pass the salt" until they give it to you right?

00:04:46

That's not how behavior works. One cue.

But you don't want to add the cue to your dog until you're willing to bet me a thousand dollars that the dog's got it. So, we take the behavior on the road.

We take that blanket, go into a different room of your house, throw it out on the floor. There's a very good chance your dog's going to go, "Wait a minute. I've seen that blanket somewhere before."

00:05:08

They're going to jump on that blanket and you're going to give them the cue "search" which means go and find the cookie. You're going to get off the blanket.

You're going to go back and forth jumping on. And now the dog's like, "Hey, this blanket is meaningful" in two rooms.



Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

00:05:21

Take it to a few more rooms. Maybe even go out in your backyard. And then I would go back into a nice, comfortable environment like your living room and you're ready to add the cue. You've done what three, four, five different locations and the dog is as soon as he sees the stimulus of the blanket, he offers the behavior that he's gotten a lot of rewards for in the past. And so, what you're going to do is you're now going to add the cue and here's how you're going to do it.

00:05:50

First thing you're going to decide, do I want to add a physical cue or a verbal cue? Now, most people are going to add a verbal cue, but just for fun let's add the physical cue first. And it doesn't matter which one you do. I promise you. And so, we're going to say "search", throw the cookie out and when the dog turns back, I want you to point to the blanket. And they're going to notice, "Hey, she's doing something different." You're pointing to the blanket.

00:06:18

The dog gets on the blanket, you're going to say the word "search", do this a few times. Point to the blanket. Now, maybe the fourth or fifth time you do it throw the cookie out, move the blanket so you're pointing in a new direction. Your point is now a physical cue for the dog to get on the blanket. Get on the blanket, earn rewards. What a great gig, what dog wouldn't want to do that.

00:06:39

You now have a physical cue that means 'go on your spot', 'get on your bed', 'hop it up' or whatever verbal cue you want to add to that. But right now, all we've got is a physical one. Now I will admit I generally add the verbal cues first, but not always. I'll share some of those later on. Back to our blanket.

00:07:01

So now we're going to a new room and we're going to try this again. We're going to put the blanket on the floor point to it, the dog's immediately going to run over and jump on it, probably even before you get your point finished. Say your word "search", throw the cookie off, point to the blanket again. The dog's going to go "Okay. There's something about this point. It's a really cool thing."

00:07:20

Now we're in our second location. We've pointed to the blanket several times, the dogs got on, got the reward. Now we're going to ask our dog to sit, pretty close to the blanket. And once the dog goes into a sit, you're going to point to the blanket. And your dog - lo and behold - is going to go "Gee, I think that means I can get on the blanket." They're going to jump up and get on the blanket. Now, if they don't, you can give you release word like "break" if it's break or "okay". Whatever you normally use to get the dog to get off the blanket. But before long, your dog is going to be jumping to their spot on the finger point alone.

00:08:00

Now I like to use the finger point. I use it for two reasons. I'll use the finger point actually for more than one cue which you may say, "Oh, Susan, that's confusing." I use the finger point if I have a dog that's lying down, I might point to them to get their attention. And then if I want them to do something, if they are deaf, because they're older and they can't hear me, I'll give them another cue which means maybe 'come over to me'.



Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

00:08:24

I may also point to them and then point to a dog bed, which means 'get up on the dog bed'. I may also point to them and then point to a toy and put my hand out, which means 'go and pick up that toy and bring it to me'. So, a point is a cue that if I point directly at the dog, I'm getting their attention and it's saying to them another cue will follow or a reward will follow.

So, a point, and then maybe point to get on your bed or point to do something else. Now we've got a physical cue. Let's add a verbal one. And so now what we're going to do is we're going to ask our dog to sit and you're going to think first of all what is the word that you want your dog to know to mean get on their bed.

00:09:12

Now people say things like "place". I think that's a little disrespectful. Just me. You can have it if you like it. I personally - like if you invited a friend over for a coffee and you pointed to your couch and you said "place", maybe not so friendly right? And so, you know, I use something that it's different. It's something that the dog knows what it means. It means get on something. I say, "hop it up". "Hop it up."

00:09:40

You can use anything, you know, if you think hop it up isn't polite enough you could you know, "take a seat". Whatever you like. Whatever that cue is, here's the way you add a verbal cue to a behavior the dog only knows what the physical cue. Really, really easy.

00:09:58

You first say the word, which is meaningless to the dog. They've never heard it before. But then you use the physical cue which they do know, the point, and they go, "Oh yeah. Oh, I got that. I don't know what hop it up means but I know what that means." And then you go back and generalize that. So, you might do it a few times.

00:10:17

Say the word "search", throw it off, say "hop it up" and then point to the bed. Now you probably don't even need to point to the bed because "search", the bed in the room, the dog's going to do this. Before you know it, you'll be able to use either point or hop it up to get your dog to do what you want. There'll be times you may want to just use a point.

00:10:37

For example, I have five dogs. If I want one dog to do something and I don't want to get all the other dogs all upset, I'll point to that one dog and then I'll point somewhere else. "You can just go there. I'm going to give you cookies, but I don't want anyone else to know." All right. So, I love pointing to get attention and then you can point to do all kinds of things.

00:10:58

Now, "Susan, but I have cues that my dog knows [like, sit](#). How do I add a cue to that?" Just keep this little phrase in your brain.

New Cue - Old Cue.

New cue, old cue. All right. So, what is the cue the dog knows, they know sit, that's the old cue. What has to happen in front of that? The new cue. So, for my dogs, the cue to sit is I'll put my hand out to the side and I'll bend at the elbow and then bring the elbow up to my shoulder.



Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

00:11:33

I like when I'm giving physical cues, I like cues that get my arms away from my body. Because if my dog's at a distance, they should still be able to see those cues. So, if I want my dog to come, something like I used to use, a big sweeping arm kind of like you know like I'm cracking a whip. And that goes back to my old competition obedience days.

00:11:58

That was a physical cue for high level obedience that meant 'come' to the dog.

But I think when my dogs are further away putting my hands together at the top of my hand like over my head is a much more salient cue for my dogs to see at a distance. So, a great recall cue, you know, you're going to do this nice and close.

00:12:20

What is the cue that your dog knows? My dogs know to come on their name or maybe the word "here". And so, what you would do, **new cue, old cue**.

New cue is hands over your head, forming a triangle over the top of your head and then you're going to say your dog's name.

You do that often enough they're going to learn that that hands over your head means 'I need to see you. I got some really cool things. I just got to get you over here.' All right.

00:12:47

Most people, what they do when they want to teach a dog down, they put a cookie in their hand, they lure the dog to the ground. And then that hand motion towards the ground becomes the dogs down cue.

But as I mentioned, a lot of times the dog doesn't learn the physical cue or the verbal cue really well. So go ahead and separate it.

00:13:08

And you can test this. Take – write down right now what five cues do you think your dog knows really well. If you're listening to this and you're an agility competitor include some of those. Write down five cues that your dog knows really well.

Now I'd like you to go into a position you wouldn't normally be going into like maybe sit on the floor, close your eyes and ask your dog to do that cue and then open and see if the dog did it.

00:13:32

I want you to close your eyes because I don't want you to lean or do the normal things that you might do.

Physical prompts could be anything. I'm giving you some really salient ones, some big arms in the air. Some big— if my cue for my dogs to lie down, it's like a stop sign going out for my shoulder forward.

00:13:50

And it's like if there's a car coming, hit the deck, I need you to lie down. And so, if your dog was a long distance away and your down signal is this very wimpy pretend lure cookie between your fingers pointing towards the ground. It's all in front of you. The dog is not likely going to be able to see it, and they're less likely to be able to comply.



Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

00:14:11

So, you want your physical cues to be nice big body cues. Now, if you've got a deaf dog, you might be giving them body cues or physical cues around the house all the time.

So, you might take like lower key cues, like just things with your hands, right? Like maybe if I had a deaf dog, I might put my flat on my hand out and make like a walking stick across my hand, a walking stick man. Like that might mean, 'do you need to go out?'. 'Do you need to go out?'

And maybe if I wanted them to know we're going for a big walk, it might be more walking people like it might be like I'm making it rain or something like rain, rain with my hands.

00:14:49

I haven't had a dog that's gone deaf super young. And so, I've not used these kinds of cues, but I have used recall cues are the biggie for my dog as they're unable to hear.

And the down cue, emergency down cue, I want my dogs to listen to that from a long distance. Now I mentioned earlier on, I have physical cues that I teach first and I never add a verbal cue to them. And so, things like a hand touch where I put my hand out for my dog and they immediately know 'touch my nose to that hand and that's how I could get cookies'.

00:15:21

I never add a verbal cue, or I haven't to date ever added a verbal cue to that. A lot of people when they're teaching it, they will say to their dog "touch, touch, touch", like their dog in another lifetime understood English. When you're teaching a dog, anything it's all about what is the stimulus. So, if I'm teaching a hand touch, the stimulus is this big old hand.

00:15:47

I might put it right beside their nose and they'd only have to move their nose like a half a millimeter, and they get a reward. I don't have to say "touch, touch, touch" just like I don't have to say, "pass the salt, pass the salt, pass the salt."

It's the stimulus of the big old hand, the dog offers that, they get a reinforcement they go, "Hey, I think I want to do that more often."

00:16:08

And so, you really want to separate out those verbal cues. If there's anything you take away from this podcast, it's **stimulus**, wait for the dog to offer the **behavior** and then **reinforce**, generalize that behavior in at least three to five different environments and then name it.

Most of us are going to use a verbal cue first, and then you can add a physical cue once the dog really understands that verbal cue impressively well in all different locations.

And remember when you want to add the physical cue keep in mind, new cue comes first and then the old cue, right?

00:16:50

You want to let say, the dog knows the verbal, you show them the physical and then say the verbal. Try that out today.

Let's take a behavior your dog knows really, really well with a verbal cue and let's add a physical cue to it. It might be something that they really liked, like going for a walk, how much fun would that be?





Episode: #113

Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

00:17:09

Just add something crazy. You know, the most common ones that people know, like they'll make like a puppet hand for bark or for speak. That's one, if you haven't got that cue, add that, that's like, that's so, so, so easy. But I'd like you to consider - let's set the intention. All of our dogs are going to live to be 20.

00:17:29

And when they get to that age chances are they're not going to be able to hear us. What cues do you want your dog to be able to see at a distance? Okay. I give it to you. They might not see us that well either, but let's just project. They're going to have amazing sight, but they're not going to be able to hear what are the cues we're going to teach them today so that they'll have them when they turn 20.

00:17:51

Now these cues, remember they also work really, really well when you're outside at a distance, big wind, your voice isn't carrying. Maybe you've got laryngitis. These physical cues are brilliant. That's it for today. I'd love to know how these experiments work out for your dog.

00:18:10

So don't forget. Jump over to our website or come see the video on YouTube. Leave me a comment. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 44: Using Coincidences and Positive Associations in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 6: The Art of Manipulation](#)

[YouTube Video: Perch Work \(Pivots and Spins\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 85: Understanding Your Dog's Sit: LWT](#)

[Blog Post: Dog Training Question ~ When Do I Add a Cue?](#)



Your Dog's Verbal Cues And Hand Signals: How To Effectively Train Both

About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



Meet Us Online

- Website <https://dogsthat.com>
- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SusanGarrettDogAgility/>
- Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/SusanGarrettDogsThat/>
- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
- Pinterest <https://pinterest.ca/dogsthatcom/>
- Twitter <https://twitter.com/susangarrett>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/c/DogsThat>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/ClickerDogs>

