

# Why You Shouldn't Say No To Your Dog!

The word 'No!' is the most over-used term in dog training – and yet surprisingly it has the least meaning to a dog. I often encounter clients who self righteously assure me that their dog 'knows' what 'No!' means. Often I reply that if he really does 'understand' the word 'No!' then why must they:

- a) Repeat it constantly
- b) Use an increasingly angry tone each time
- c) Often accompany it with physical punishment
- d) Do something else to stop the dog (i.e. pull him off Aunty Mavis, take the
- e) shoes off him etc)



As someone who can honestly say that I have never used the word 'No!' with my own dog I can assure you that it's not a necessary word to use with a dog. In fact, it can do more harm than good. People that continuously bellow 'No!' at their dog are stressing out both themselves and the dog. They are clearly demonstrating a lack of ability to manage their dog's behaviour and a need for training. Below I have outlined some of the reasons that using the word 'No!' can be counterproductive.

#### The word 'No!' does not teach dog what you DO want.

It simply conveys to him that he's doing something bad. There are a myriad of things a dog can get wrong but fewer he can get right. Trying to train your dog by nagging and telling him 'No!' each time he does something wrong rather than reinforcing the things he does right will be exhausting for you and confusing for your dog.



Phone **07 3390 8840** Fax **07 3890 8805** 

Mobile **0406 678 645** 

Email danielle@urbandogtraining.com.au

Web www.urbandogtraining.com.au



For example, when greeting humans it's undesirable for your dog to:

- a) Jump Up
- b) Bite/Mouth/Nip
- c) Urinate
- d) Bark/Whine
- e) Paw people
- f) Mount/Hump
- g) Nudge/Push/Lean
- h) Lick etc

However, it is desirable for him to:

a) Sit calmly and politely and wait for attention

Why wouldn't you teach him to greet the correct way rather than nagging him and bellowing 'No!' each time he makes an incorrect choice? Besides, when he's looking for attention, even saying the word 'No!' is giving him what he wants anyway!

The word 'No!' can often be said in a very intimidating manner, especially by men, which can frighten a dog.

I have seen dogs sufficiently scared that they cringe, cower and urinate submissively when they hear their owner bellow 'NOOOOO!!!!'.

The word 'No!' when used as a punishment will often 'shut down' a dog, inhibiting him from offering all behaviour, whether good or bad.

Imagine your dog is lying quietly on his mat (a behaviour we like), he's watching you (another behaviour we like) and he's chewing on your shoe (a behaviour we don't like). You tell him 'No!' – does this mean he shouldn't be:

- a) Lying quietly on the mat
- b) Looking at you
- c) Chewing on the shoe



Phone **07 3390 8840** 

Fax **07 3890 8805** 

Mobile **0406 678 645** 

Email danielle@urbandogtraining.com.au

Web www.urbandogtraining.com.au



Of course, the answer is c) Chewing on the shoe, but since the dog is performing all three things simultaneously how would he know which one you want him to stop? In this case using the word 'No!' may cause desired behaviours to cease such as, a) lying quietly on a mat or b) looking at you.

Often dogs that hear 'No!' all the time stop offering behaviours at all. They simply shut-down because they are afraid of doing something wrong.

## The word 'No!' is so often over-used that dogs learn to ignore it in any case.

Each time you say 'No!' and do nothing to back it up, your dog learns that 'No!' is irrelevant to him and should be ignored. They also learn that you have no credibility and will not reinforce what you say.

# The word 'No!' can often be reinforcing to a dog that cannot get attention other ways.

Often in training classes we watch in astonishment as owners blissfully ignore a dog that is paying them his undivided attention. When the dog finally gets exasperated with the owner ignoring all his good behaviour he begins to act up. Then the owner showers the dog with attention, telling him 'No!', pushing him down, petting him in an effort to calm him etc. What did the dog learn? If you want attention from humans, act like an idiot and you're sure to get it. Rather than catching the dog in the act of doing something good and rewarding it, thereby increasing the likelihood of the good behaviour occurring again in the future, saying no often gives the dog the attention it crayes.

# People frequently say 'No!' when the dog is doing the right thing.

I often see people punish their dog by waving a finger around in their face while bellowing 'No!' when the dog is actually doing the right thing – how confusing for the dog.

The best example of this is when a dog jumps up to greet a human visitor; the owner angrily drags him off the visitor and pushes him down to the ground. The owner, who is obviously embarrassed by their dog's behaviour, then begins waving the finger around, angrily saying 'No! Bad Dog! No Jumping!' Of course the whole time the owner is telling the dog off he's sitting on the ground – doing the right thing!

What did the dog learn? Sitting in front of visitors is bad.

Another example of this is when a dog bolts out the front gate and down the street. The owner chases the dog around calling it to come back. When the dog finally comes back the owner starts waving the finger around, telling the dog 'No! Bad Dog! No running away!"

What did the dog learn? Coming back is bad.



Phone **07 3390 8840**Fax **07 3890 8805** 

Mobile **0406 678 645** 

Email danielle@urbandogtraining.com.au
Web www.urbandogtraining.com.au



# What To Do Instead

Be proactive rather than reactive. If you find yourself saying 'No!' constantly to your dog chances are that you're not supervising him or managing him well enough – and you definitely haven't trained him enough!

## **Manage Your Dog's Environment**

If you know your dog cannot be trusted to behave in an acceptable manner in any given situation – MANAGE THE SITUATION so that your dog cannot get into trouble in the first place. Then – and here's a novel concept – TRAIN HIM TO BEHAVE APPROPRIATELY in the future.

### For example:

- If you know your dog dashes out the front door and down the street when the door is opened, then do not open the door unless the dog is on a lead.
- If you know your dog raids the kitchen tidy, get one with a lockable lid or store
  it in a cupboard or a different room.
- If you know your dog is a sock or knicker thief, then don't leave socks and knickers lying around where the dog can get to them.

Teach your dog some simple commands so that you can give him clear instructions on what you DO want him to do.

Commands such as 'Leave It', 'Off', 'Give', 'Down', 'Quiet' etc will help with this.

# For example:

- Your dog is about to steal a steak from the kitchen bench, you can instruct him to 'Leave It'.
- Your dog is lying quietly on a mat chewing a shoe, you can instruct him to 'Give'.
- Your dog jumps on a visitor, you can instruct him to 'Sit' instead.
- Your dog gets up on the couch, you can instruct him to get 'Off'.
- Your dog is barking at the back fence, you can instruct him to be 'Quiet'.



Phone **07 3390 8840** 

Fax **07 3890 8805** 

Mobile **0406 678 645** 

Email danielle@urbandogtraining.com.au

Web www.urbandogtraining.com.au



## Teach a 'Cease and Desist' Command

Teach your dog your dog a command such as 'Ah Ah' (often accompanied with a hand-clap), which cannot be said in a very scary manner.

The 'Ah Ah' command is designed to simply interrupt your dog's behaviour, so that you can then re-direct him onto something appropriate to do instead. As soon as your dog is engaged the right thing, be sure to reward him.

Do not fall into the trap of saying 'Ah Ah' mindlessly and repeatedly. If you hear yourself repeating 'Ah Ah' too often then you are not managing your dog's environment well enough.

For more information on using the 'Ah Ah' command appropriately read our article 'Controlling Undesirable Behaviour'.



Phone **07 3390 8840** 

Fax **07 3890 8805** 

Mobile **0406 678 645** 

Email **danielle@urbandogtraining.com.au**Web **www.urbandogtraining.com.au**