



Using Time Out Correctly

Time Out is very effective method to suppress undesirable behaviour in dogs. Studies have shown that, when used correctly, Time Out is as effective as electric shock in suppressing behaviour in dogs. This is due to a number of factors:

1. Dogs are social creatures and highly regard social contact with humans, other animals and familiar places and being removed from this, even for brief periods, can cause mild distress in dogs. Dogs will work hard to avoid this.
2. Often when seeking the attention of humans dogs will step all over social boundaries (biting, jumping up, pawing, barking etc) in an effort to gain the attention they so strongly desire. Time out helps humans to set and enforce social boundaries whereby any violations result in a total loss of social privileges for a brief period. The dog then learns that attention seeking behaviours result in exactly the opposite - isolation. They learn to find more productive ways to gain human attention.
3. When in time out, dogs are removed from anything they might find reinforcing such as, human contact, affection, play, treats and training. This includes accidental reinforcement by humans, such as looking at a dog that is barking for attention.
4. Time out enables your dog to learn by the consequences of its actions. For example, if using time out to counteract nuisance barking, each and every time the dog barks he is placed in time out. Upon release from time out his continued freedom is dependent upon him remaining calm and quiet, further episodes of barking result in additional time outs.



In order to be effective, a number of factors need to be considered:

Marking the behaviour

We need to help our dogs identify exactly which behaviour earned the time out. This can be achieved by using a word or phrase such as 'Too Bad', 'Time Out' or 'Enough' at the *precise moment* the dog is engaged in the undesirable behaviour. Then immediately taking hold of the collar or lead and placing the dog in time out. The use of a marker signal helps the dog to connect the time out with the behaviour that put him there in the first place.



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Incorrect use of the time out marker (or cue) will confuse the dog and may cause unwanted side effects. Good timing is essential! For example, it is futile using the time out marker when you spot your favourite pair of shoes chewed to pieces an hour after it occurred. The dog cannot possibly connect the two events. You would need to catch the dog *in the act* of chewing for the time out cue to be effective and for the dog to associate the events.

Repetition

Dogs learn through repetition and time out is no exception to this rule. Some firmly entrenched behaviours may require several repetitions in order to get the message through to the dog. Consistency is the key with time outs. If a particular behaviour (e.g. jumping up) is punished with a time out sometimes and other times rewarded with affection and/or attention the dog will be confused and your efforts wasted. It is unreasonable to expect that your dog will learn what he did wrong in one or two repetitions.

Duration

Time out should not last more than 3 minutes (typically 1-2 minutes is enough) or until the dog has been calm and quiet for a brief period (15-30 seconds). Initially, waiting for the dog to calm down can take some time. However, allowing a dog out of time out while he is barking, whining, scratching or otherwise acting up only serves to reinforce this behaviour and guarantee future occurrences.

Placement

Time out should take place in an undesirable location; away from anything the dog may find reinforcing. Simply placing the dog outside provides an opportunity for the dog to engage in the outdoor environment (i.e. chase birds, digging, running, chewing etc).

Some of the best venues for time out include toilets, bathrooms and laundries. To further reinforce the loss of privileges you might also close the dog's lead in the doorjamb, allowing enough room to sit and stand but not wander around the room.

If you must use outdoors for a time out venue then the dog should be tethered to a post or heavy object somewhere boring (such as a sideways) with nothing close by that he could find reinforcing.

Occasionally you may find yourself in a situation where you cannot time your dog out in the usual manner because a small boring room may not be available, for example when you are out on a walk. In these circumstances you can still deliver a very effective time out if the need arises. Simply give your dog the usual time out cue (Too Bad, Time Out or Enough) and give your dog the cold shoulder. Do not look at your dog, talk to your dog or touch your dog for approximately 1-2 minutes. If your dog solicits your attention turn your head away, fold your arms across your chest and snub him.

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Assuming it is safe to do so, you could tether your dog somewhere boring away from you. Alternatively, you could also step in his lead whilst ignoring him to prevent him from engaging in the environment and gaining inadvertent reinforcement.

Time In

For time out to be effective the dog must have an environment that he does not want to be excluded from. For example, if your dog's time spent with you is filled with punishments, nagging, shouting then time out might serve as a welcome relief for the dog. Similarly, in homes where the stress levels are high (such as children yelling or teasing the dog constantly) the dog might look forward to a period of isolation (just as many humans might, if given the same circumstances!). For a dog that normally socially isolated (the 'outdoor dog') time out is merely more isolation and may not be productive.

When allowing your dog freedom in your home during the early stages of training it is important that this time is accompanied by play, training, affection, or attention – i.e. 'Time In'. During this time you should be actively teaching your dog socially acceptable behaviour. This will guarantee that the forced removal from social contact with you, as a consequence of socially unacceptable behaviour, is unpleasant for your dog. This will also be beneficial to your leadership efforts since your dog will associate everything fun with you.

Reinforce Correct Behaviour

Upon release from time out it is important to take the dog to the exact area where the violation occurred and prompt and reinforce the correct behaviour. For example, if the dog received a time out for jumping up then he would be taken back to the area where the infraction occurred and prompted to sit before being treated, praised and released. If the dog jumps up again rather than sitting, he would be timed out again immediately. This process would be repeated until the dog no longer jumps up after being released.

Remember, dogs learn through repetition!

Reinforcing the correct behaviour also means that while your dog is doing the right things that you reward him for it. Many people pay the most attention to the worst behaviours and totally ignore the good stuff! When you catch him lying quietly reward him, this will make lying quietly more likely to happen again.

If time out is not working for you then the chances are that you are not doing it right since this method has been scientifically proven to suppress unwanted behaviour. When used correctly this method of punishment is far more effective than any other method.



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