

Introducing Equipment

Not all dogs have experience with equipment like collars, leashes, harnesses, or muzzles. If the dog you're working with seems nervous about the equipment, it's time to do a bit of work using Pavlov's friend: Classical Conditioning.

The basic principle of classical conditioning is that we want to present something the dog likes, (usually treats, but sometimes it can be praise or physical contact,) whenever the equipment is present.

1. Identify a reward that the dog likes at that moment.
 - a. Just because the dog likes physical contact outside of the kennel does not mean that they will enjoy it in the kennel right now!
2. Present the equipment to the dog, then immediately give them a reward.
 - a. Don't take the equipment away. Just leave it sitting there, ideally somewhere the dog can safely sniff it if they want to.
3. Reward the dog for any interaction with the equipment. This could be touching it, sniffing it, or even just quickly glancing at it!
4. Repeat this until the dog is happy to see the equipment.
5. Once the dog likes seeing the equipment, you can start to change it up a bit.
 - a. Reward the dog every time you change something about the equipment, for example if you move it slightly, drop it on the floor, pick it up, etc.
6. Don't put the equipment on until the dog is pretty sure that they like it.

Adopter Highlight

You can do this activity in the kennel with the door open for nervous dogs who don't want to move yet, with the kennel door closed for dogs who are barking/lunging/growling, or in front of an adopter to demonstrate how to introduce a harness or a muzzle. This is a great time to demonstrate to an adopter where the dog is at with this piece of equipment. Some dogs may have experience with collars, but not harnesses. Others may have a negative experience with a collar, and we have to work on teaching them new information about the collar: It means there's good things coming! This activity can also help build trust between an adopter and their new dog.