**The TOUCH Cue**

OK... let’s move to the next cue that we are going to talk about today – TOUCH. The

standard for the “touch” cue is “drop what you’re doing and touch the target with your

nose”.

Dogs are made to smell things. The smell of another animal tells your dog their age, sex

and location information. Not only does your dog’s nose tell them all this information

about other dogs, but it can also tell them things about humans too. Dogs are able to

smell fear in a person, or can know exactly who is barbecuing hot dogs on your street. A

dog’s sense of smell can also help them to determine whether a particular situation is

positive or negative. Dogs use scent to sense the emotional state of other creatures,

including humans. Think about how dogs use their noses to root around in holes in the

ground, searching for small rodents, just because their nose tells them that they are

there, even though the dog may not be able to see the rodent. Dogs are smart, which is

why they also use their noses for things other than scent, such as when your dog nudges

your arm with their nose to ask for attention. They wedge their noses into doors to open

them, or to get into a cabinet where trash might be kept. Service dog trainers

understand the importance of shaping a dog’s natural behaviors into specific cues that

we can then use to our benefit. Look at how some service dogs are trained to use their

nose to turn light switches on or off, or to push automatic door buttons. This just goes to

show how “touch” is the foundation of so many more advanced cues.

Just like the “watch” cue, “touch” utilizes a dog’s natural curiosity, as well as their instinct

to investigate things with their nose, to encourage them to bond with us. We will primarily

be using touch as an attention-getting cue, as well as a way to calm a dog down. Service

dog trainers use touch to get a dog’s attention back onto the task at hand, and to show

the dog that their leader is calm, which then has a calming effect on the dog. The way in

which a dog’s nose sniffs out environmental situations can be used to our advantage,

with our scent being able to send out a calming signal to the dog. The scent of a trusted

human will automatically seem familiar and comforting to a dog. Using this as a training

cue is a great way to bond with your dog, and can also be so helpful when you need to

calm your dog down.

To use this cue in a situation where your dog seems anxious is surprisingly simple, yet so

effective. Sometimes, when dogs are fearful or in a highly excitable state, they have

trouble disengaging their eyes from the stimuli in order to focus on something else.

Asking the dog to “touch” means that they will have to turn their head towards you. Their

eyes will then follow, allowing the dog to focus on you, rather than the distraction. While

the “watch” command asks for direct eye contact, the “touch” command asks for direct

physical contact. Dogs often find physical contact to be more grounding and calming

than eye contact, which is why asking your dog to touch you with their nose has a calming

effect, with both your scent as well as the physical contact helping with this. Not only are

they able to smell your calm scent, but they will feel your touch, giving them double the

calming effects. In fact, “watch” and “touch” can be used together, one right after the

other, to keep your dog’s attention focused on you in a highly distracting environment.

Going back and forth between asking your dog to “watch” and “touch” is a great way to

keep them interactively engaged, while something new or scary might be going on in the

background.

Most people overlook the sheer power of a dog’s nose, along with its many different

uses, simply because our own nose isn’t nearly as useful when it comes to scenting

emotional states or physical contact. So, it’s hardly surprising that few people take the

time to learn how to teach this valuable cue to their dog, because it isn’t intuitive for

humans to use those same body parts for similar tasks. Thanks to how powerful a dog’s

nose is, “touch” is such a great bonding tool, and the only way to teach it is with positive

training techniques. Once your dog learns this cue, it will significantly decrease the time it

takes for you and your dog to really bond with each other.

So, to teach your dog this command, please follow these steps:

1. First, hold a treat in your fist.

2. Then, bring your fist near to your dog’s nose.

3. Your dog will naturally touch your hand while sniffing for the treat.

4. Then, as soon as your dog’s nose touches your closed fist, open it and allow your

dog to eat out of it, while still saying nothing.

5. Practice this by taking turns holding the treat in your left and right fist, until your

dog can quickly “touch” the correct hand.

Just like the “watch” cue, do this ten times in a row, three or more times a day.

Now, there are a couple of important points to keep in mind while teaching the “touch”

cue.

First, if you have a small dog, then you may need to bend down a bit so that your dog can

touch you without having to jump up. It’s important to not have your dog jump in order to

touch you because this might get them to develop the habit of jumping, which we

obviously don’t want.

Second, when you bring the fist near to your dog’s nose, have your hand and fist facing

forward so that you don’t need to twist your hand when you open the fist to give the

treat to your dog.

So, just like with the “watch” cue, practice the “touch” cue multiple times a day, in all

rooms of your house. In addition to moving to different rooms, you can also try moving

your fist over to different parts of your body. Try it with your fist to your side, as well as

up high and low down, as this will advance the way in which your dog looks for your fist as

a target.

Once your dog is successful 8 out of 10 times, you can then add in the verbal cue. Say

the word “touch” at the exact moment your dog’s nose touches your hand, just as you’re

opening your hand to release the treat. Remember to only say the cue word when your

dog’s nose is touching the correct hand.

Advance this behavior even further by adding the voice cue as soon as you show your

dog your fist with the treat inside. So to advance the behavior, please follow these steps:

1. First, put the treat in your fist.

2. Then, place your fist in front of your dog, and say the cue word “touch”.

3. Only after your dog touches the correct fist should you dispense the treat.

Once your dog has mastered the “touch” cue, you can then change the way you hold the

treat, going from a closed fist to a flat palm. The reason we use the fist in the beginning is

to hide the visual image of the treat, as this encourages your dog to use their nose to

search for the treat. However, the palm of your hand has more of a scent than your fist,

making this a better surface area for touching while you’re walking or in motion. Plus, if

your dog comes towards you really quickly to “touch” your fist, it might be too hard of an

impact on their nose, so slowly start to graduate to an open palm when saying the cue

word.