



The Shy or Unmotivated Dog (how to build motivation)

By Tuff Pup Training, LLC

Motivation In Dog Training:

- “My Dog Doesn’t Like Treats”
- “My Dog Wont Eat Food Outside”
- “My Dog Plays But Only When She Wants To”
- “My Dog Will Hide If I Try To Interact”

What motivates one dog may be of no interest to another. Some dogs are only motivated by certain things in certain settings. It’s not uncommon for a dog who loves playing fetch to do so endlessly off leash in a park but inside a house or around certain people the dog’s response is lackluster. Additionally, If a dog is overwhelmed, stressed or afraid that dog may become emotionally reserved. Stress and fear very often leads to a loss of appetite and reticent behavior .

How do I build my dog’s motivation and confidence?

One thing is clear - If you have something the dog wants and your dog feels safe, you can train the dog. If you don't have anything your dog wants, we'll have to do a bit of motivation preparation.

Motivation preparation:

As you go through this process it will become clear that it’s the dog who decides what’s rewarding and what’s not. Your opinion doesn't really count. We will focus on three main topics that effect motivation: The Training Space (where you train), The Reward and your Daily Leadership Plan...

- **The Training Space**

Start looking for places where you can control how much is going on around you. For shy or easily overwhelmed dogs the best place to start training (and learning) is in your own living room. With scared dogs, you can start in the bathroom with the door closed where there are no distractions all. It should be a space with nothing to think about but speaking calmly to each other. The calmer and quieter the situation, the better you'll both be able to figure out what you're doing. The “real world” isn't calm and quiet but starting with these basic environments can give you and your dog a chance to learn the skills needed to “survive” those more difficult and chaotic situations. You and your dog will become more confident and you you’ll be able to start working in different places with more going on. The training space may be in view of something that scares your dog if that thing is far enough away that your dog

can still function (eat food, perform known cues, breathe normally). This distance is called “the threshold of tolerance”. For more information on thresholds check out more info [here](#).

- **The Rewards**

If you plan on using a certain toy or game for motivation during training make sure to eliminate access to that toy during non-training or playing hours. Similarly, consider removing any free feeding habits where food bowls might be left out all day. Positive reward training is built around controlling the things your dog needs from you (the things around the dog) so that you don't have to rely on controlling the dog physically with discomfort, pain or intimidation. In regards to using food for training look over the outline titled “teaching your dog to eat” at the end of this document. The activities that motivate dogs the most are often activities that let dogs be dogs (sniffing, rolling, chewing, etc). For more info look at the Tuff Pup Training outline on [“enrichment”](#). Tug-of-war is a great game - when it's [played by your rules](#).

- **Daily Leadership Activities (for confidence and motivation)**

Implementing a [“Learn to earn”](#) or “Leadership program” for your dog can show the dog that she lives in a family and that the views of the family should be important to her. This is not really about training but instead it's a set of recommended daily habits to get you and your dog in sync. Many items of the following leadership recommendations you should keep up with until you feel your dog understands that good things come to her through you.

UMBILICAL CORD

When at home with your dog consider keeping the dog on a 6-foot leash. Put the leash on the dog and attach the other end of the leash to a sturdy belt around your waist. [Hands-free leash systems](#) are increasingly popular training items. Ignore the dog and go about your business. When you are sitting or standing for long periods of time you can put out dog bed, stuffed kong toys or scattered treats. This encourages your dog to hang close to you in situations where she/he might normally become aloof and wander off. This allows a chance for your dog to learn that being where you are is consistently interesting and full of rewarding opportunities. You can give your dog and yourself breaks by removing the leash and giving some downtime in the crate or other “alone zone” areas.

EYE CONTACT

Twice a day sit down with the dog between your knees, facing you and use a known cue such as your dog's name, Watch Me or you can make funny baby noises. Watch for any eye contact. Reward that eye contact with a click (or “yes”) and a food reward. You don't have to wait for perfect eye contact. Any attention towards your face should be rewarded. Look to get 3 - 5 moments of rewardable eye contact and then end the game and move on. This gives you a chance to practice getting your dog's attention but also conditions your dog to check in with you, come close to you and seek attention from you when you sit around the house.

TRAINING

Any positive reward training activities will build your dog's confidence. This is due to the nature of the constant reward aspect giving your dog a lot of information about what exactly they are doing correctly. It also helps your dog understand how to communicate with the world around them. Twice a day, have a quick working session using whatever the dog knows how to do (Down, Sit, Come, etc). Let the training sessions last 4 - 5 minutes. Consider training 10 minutes before you would normally put down a food bowl. You can also use this time you teach new tricks, games or command skills. For interesting, inspiring and insightful examples of tricks to teach check out any youtube video by Kiko Pup (Emily Larlham): <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-qnqaajTk6bfs3UZuue6IQ>

HANDLING

At least once a day, handle your dog by softly by petting or manipulating parts of your dog's body. Start with both hands on your dog and let only one hand move towards a more sensitive spot like a paw. You should baby talk while you handle or say things like "These are my ears. This is my paw. This is my muzzle. This is my tail". If your dog fusses, go slower. It's important that the dog has a positive experience. She will come to see that you will be handling her, that it's part of a daily routine and it involves no pain. If your dog won't allow you to handle her like this without her getting angry or getting away, then it's recommended that you do NOT do this exercise. Instead make it a game you play during your daily training sessions to teach the dog to allow this handling. [this link here will bring you to a PDF for games to improve your dog's body sensitivity.](#)

BE SILLY

The idea of baby-talking or being generally silly in order to motivate your dog will either make total sense to you or will feel completely uncomfortable. You might feel you shouldn't "have to" baby-talk or act goofy at all to motivate your dog. As you have seen, the things that motivate your dog won't always be obvious or reasonable. Think of all those times you may have done something completely unrelated to your dog like sneezing but your dog comes walking over curiously, tilting her head or perking up her ears. Take a week where at least once a day you walk up to your dog and for a minute do a silly dance, make up a silly song, roll on the ground, etc. To anything goofy. It only has to make your dog smile and get the dog's tail wagging. Trust that dogs have a sense of humor.

LEADERSHIP IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Consider life from the dog's point of view. She sleeps where she wants, she eats when she wants, she leads you around. She gets the impression that she can do what she wants when she wants and make decisions void of your concern? If you want your dog to pause herself and look to you more for direction, information and companionship you'll have to consider how you **control resources**. Controlling resources involves pausing yourself before doing anything for your dog and asking yourself "what will my dog remember from this" or "has my dog shown me any attentive behaviors for what I'm about to do for her". This may be as simple as building a ritual around the front door. Focus your dog's attention on you: "Do you want to go out?". "Sit". When she sits, go to the door. Want to go out? Sit. Down. Sit. Stay. Then open the door: Okay, go outside! There is a

relationship contract in place. Your dog needs you (to let her out a door, etc) - she has to pay you with some mindful attention to get through these daily activities.

WORK OFF ENERGY

Speak to your vet about the difference between "ample" exercise and "too much" or "not enough" based on your dog's age and breed. For more information on setting up an exercise routine for your dog check out the [Tuff Pup Training outline on exercise](#).

TEACHING YOUR DOG TO EAT

This eating regimen is designed for healthy dogs who are "picky" eaters, or who don't value food enough to work for it. Highly fearful or shy dogs tend not to eat as a symptom of their fear. They often rather stay on high alert and can't relax or focus enough to consume food. It's always recommend a vet check to eliminate the possibility of any physical problems causing a lack of interest in eating before starting a dog on this protocol. You may consider speaking with a specialized [Veterinary Behaviorist](#)

There are many reasons to gain control over your dog's eating habits. If you don't, you wont...

- Be able to know how much she eats (3 kernels?)
- Control how much she weighs.
- When she ate last (an important question when you're prepping for emergency surgery).
- Any control over using food for motivation for training.

Here is a regimen to get your dog to eat "on cue":

1. Decide how much food the dog should be getting in a day (let's say one cup, as an example). Divide that amount into 2 meals.
2. Call your dog over for a meal time. Develop a ritual. Say things like "Are you hungry? Where's your dish? Where's the food? Alright! Get in the crate (or on your bed or spot)
3. Put down the half cup of food and Count to five. If, as you get to 5, you dog is still eating, Great don't do anything.
4. If, at any time before you counted to 5 your dog turns away from the dish (doesn't get to the bottom, doesn't polish the bowl) say nothing but pick up the dish, and put the food away.
5. If you get to 5 seconds and the dog isn't eating, say nothing but pick up the dish, and put it away. Give her nothing until her next scheduled meal or training session.
6. If the dog doesn't approach the dish or turns away from the food and you had to take the dish away - measure what's left and give her that amount of food in the bowl on the next feeding attempt.
7. When she eats ALL the food in her dish, you can give her slightly more at her next scheduled meal and more at the next one, etc, until she's back to getting - and eating - the appropriate amount you want her too.

During this process you can substitute this feeding from a bowl option with food-based training games. You can juggle between feeding from a bowl and feeding from hand during games. By following this regimen, you are not withholding food. You're offering food twice a day (sometimes more) but limited windows of opportunity. If the dog is healthy and just "fussy", all she has to do is choose to eat. If you feel your dog is not eating because you are in the room or looking at her you might consider positioning the bowl farther from you than normal and sitting across the room. You could even leave the room, and then listen carefully for kibble chomping. If after 5 seconds there is no eating sounds or your dog walks away from the room then pick up the bowl, put the food away and wait for the next training session or meal time.

Suggested Reading and Resources:

- [Body Language Extended](#)
- [How Not To Greet A Dog](#)

Websites:

- Fearfuldog.com
- [D.I.N.O \(Dogs in need of space\)](#)
- [Tuff Pup Training's resources page](#) (scroll down to "Reactivity, Aggression and Fearful dogs" for other helpful links)