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🧠 Understanding Reinforcement

At Anke's Dog Training, my approach revolves around fostering desired behaviours by reinforcing the actions I want to encourage and setting up the environment so that it is easier for the dog to make the right choices (offering the behaviours we want to see). Central to my philosophy is cultivating of a strong connection between humans and their dogs, allowing dogs to make choices and earn reinforcement in a supportive environment. Techniques involving physical or psychological intimidation, inflicting pain, or using aversive methods find no place in my educational ethos.
We can use food, toys, play or activities to reinforce behaviours.

"Our dogs are doing the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment we've put them in" – Susan Garrett

Why understanding reinforcement is crucial:

Identifying what *is* reinforcing to your dog is imperative to shaping behaviours you want to see in the future. Reinforcement builds behaviour, and behaviour is communication. The behaviour that is reinforced will be repeated in the future.

It's essential to recognise that reinforcement is subjective to the individual dog; what may be reinforcing for one may not necessarily be for another. Therefore, taking the time to discern what motivates your dog is crucial. Look beyond conventional rewards like food and toys - observe whether your dog derives pleasure from activities like sniffing, socialising with other dogs or people, or engaging in specific play behaviours.

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RESOURCES

Recognising Reinforcing Behaviours

Furthermore, it's essential to recognise instances where your dog self-reinforces, essentially diverting reinforcement away from you/desired behaviours. Observing your dog in various environments can provide insight into their preferences and distractions. Maintaining a Reinforcement List and Distraction List, which you can find in our Resources or in any of our Programs, facilitates this process. Additionally, bear in mind that preferences
can fluctuate depending on the circumstances, necessitating flexibility and ongoing observation and adjustment in your training approach. The toy that your dog is going crazy for at home might be of no interest when out and about.

Take the time to collect your dog's reinforcers and value them from low to high with my "Your dog's reinforcement list".

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