



Maplewood Dog Training

353 N Main St – Sharon, MA 02067

781 806 5707

www.maplewooddog.com

How to Make Successful Behavior Change Possible

Behavior change is a process that takes time and life style change. Think of it as trying to lose a significant amount of weight. Your doctor says if you don't lose 50 lbs you will be at risk for a heart attack. You try a diet and hit the gym for 2 weeks and lose some weight, but then slip back into old habits of twinkies and ho-hos and those 5 lbs you lost come right back and then some. To really lose the weight, and save your health, you need to make significant life style change and commitment to your long term health. 50 lbs won't come off in 2 weeks, it won't even come off in 2 months; it's a process that may take you a year of consistent work, forethought and effort and then, to keep the weight off, keeping up those new behavior practices for a life time. Behavior change with your dog is the same. It's a process that may take years, if not the life of your dog, and it takes owner commitment and forethought to set your dog up for success and make lasting change possible.

Why Behavior Change Takes So Long-

- Your dog does the behavior we are trying to change because, in your dog's mind, the behavior works.
 - Barking, lunging, growling at the person or dog makes the trigger go away
 - Peeing on the living room rug, makes the need to void disappear
 - Jumping on your friend as they come in the front door gets the person to pay attention to him
- Behaviors that work, generally work very effectively to give your dog the life or functional reward he desires
- Behaviors that work, because they are so effective, are generally intermittently reinforced, or reinforced sometimes, which keeps the dog always hopeful that the behavior will work once again. Think of behaviors reinforced on a sometimes schedule like playing a slot machine. Sometimes you win and you are therefore always hopeful and willing to play again to see if you'll win once more
- Behavior change asks your dog to put aside the behavior he know works very effectively, and chose alternate behaviors that initially the dog doesn't trust will work as well as the original behavior we want to change. This is a very difficult thing to ask any being to do, dog or human

Behavior Change Involves-

- **Removing all possibility for the current behavior we want to change from being reinforced**
 - This often means significant life style changes for both you and your dog-
 - Changing where or when you walk your dog to avoid triggers
 - Covering or blocking your windows or chain link fence with a barrier so your dog can't watch out and react to people or other dogs walking by
 - Setting up a safety system that is always implemented when people come to the door
 - Consistently using a tether system and confinement area when trying to house break your dog
 - Being hyper-aware and vigilant of your environment always scanning for triggers, and changing the situation before your dog reacts
 - Only taking your dog out when you can be 100% committed to him and the behavior change process
 - Recognizing that every time your dog is intermittently allowed to practice the unwanted behavior, the behavior works, and the process is set back

- **Setting up ample, structured, controllable situations for your dog to practice the new desirable behavior**
 - Significant behavior change won't happen in a few hours you work with your trainer, it takes practice
 - Practice sessions take coordination on your part to be effective and successful
 - All variables in practice sessions must be controllable by you, so that you can continue to prevent your dog from practicing the unwanted behavior or interrupt them if they begin to
 - Practice sessions must be occurring at a high frequency to give your dog ample opportunity to learn that the new desirable behavior works and is reinforcing
 - Practice sessions set your dog up for success and long term change because the new behavior now works
- **Having realistic expectations for your dog**
 - Understanding that your commitment to your dog means always setting him up for success and putting his needs, feelings, and wants first, before your own
 - This means-
 - Never putting him in a situation where he will be over faced and fail
 - Learning how to appropriately read his stress cues and immediately intervene when he begins to display them
 - Acknowledging that pro-active communication with others- friends, family, neighbors, etc. is key to setting both you and your dog up for success
 - Never taking the “well, let’s try this and see how it goes” approach
 - Changing how you respond to and interact with your dog to teach him to trust that he never needs to look further than you for safety and direction
 - Understanding that it is your responsibility to keep your dog safe, and the outside world safe from your dog
 - Understanding that with this particular dog, with this particular history, you cannot be ‘the average dog owner’ and put your dog in the situations that ‘the average dog owner’ often puts theirs
 - Understanding that both you and your dog are living beings with emotional and physical needs and wants, that the world is an unpredictable place, and that the behavior change and learning process happens with ebbs and flows and highs and lows. Accept that sometimes you are going to fail, or have a bad day, and that it is important to recognize when those times happen as, “Ok, we made a mistake, let’s learn from it and do better next time” and use the failure as a learning opportunity to encourage progress and positive change
 - Understand that behavior change is a process that takes time and is measured in small, sometimes very small, steps. Like the weight loss example, you measure that one pound at a time, or sometimes even ounces at a time, behavior change you measure in the successes you and your dog have in practicing the new behavior, staying below threshold and learning to read each other as a team
 - Understanding that the life and relationship you had with your dog before the behavior became problematic is in the past, and that a successful future means letting go of past expectations and wants and creating a new life and relationship with your dog based on the current reality that sets your dog up for the greatest success possible