



How To Fade Physical Cues

Introduction

Our puppies tend to catch on very quickly to physical cues that we are giving at the same time as our verbal cues. These physical cues may be intentional or unintentional and are usually, but not always, hand signals.

Starting with the end in mind, we need to be aware that some of our clients are unable to give physical cues, and for a Hearing Dog client we might want the dog to respond to ASL or custom sign language cues. So ideally, at this stage of their Assistance Dog journey, we would like our PAWS puppies to respond to verbal cues only.

How Do We Know if Unintentional Physical Cues are Happening?

We can often be giving our puppies unintentional physical cues without realizing. One way you can test whether you are giving unintentional physical cues is to “be a tree” (stand very still with your hands by your sides) and ask your puppy for a behavior that they know well, like “Sit” or “Down.” If they don’t respond, you may well be giving some kind of physical cue that you are not aware of! Another way of testing is to get a friend or family member to video you, and then you can look closely at your body movements.

So, how do we end up giving these unintentional physical cues? Initially, we train behaviors by luring, which involves physical action with a treat to encourage your puppy to perform a behavior, so it is not a huge step to go from that intentional lure to an unintentional physical cue. For example, when we train “Sit” we start by having a piece of kibble in our hand and asking our puppy to follow the piece of kibble with their nose as we bring it over their head, so their butt lowers into the sitting position. Once our puppies know the behavior, and will “Sit” on a verbal command, and we have faded the lure, it is very easy to still be doing some kind of movement with our hands mimicking the initial lure. Another common physical cue that we

often observe in puppy class is reaching for your treat pouch before your puppy has offered the behavior you have asked for.

If you are giving physical cues, do not despair, they can be faded just like food lures! The first step is to be aware of what you are doing and take small steps to fade the movement.

Example: Fading the Hand Cue for Down

Start at Stage 3 of the “Introduction to Down” article.

Practice each “fading step” to 80% proficiency with no fewer than 5 repetitions at each step.

- ☐ Begin on your puppy’s level (sitting or kneeling on the ground).
- ☐ Bring your hand up to your puppy’s nose so they rock back to a sit.
- ☐ Say “Down”
- ☐ ***INSERT A FADING STAGE FROM TABLE BELOW***
- ☐ When your puppy’s elbows touch the ground, say “Yes!” and give your puppy a treat. Make sure your hand doesn’t go to your treat pouch until you have said “Yes!”

FADING STAGES

1. From a sitting position, draw hand down to ground.
2. Draw hand down, stop 1 inch from ground.
3. Draw hand down, stop 2 inches from ground.
4. From a standing position, draw hand down, stop 1 inch from ground.
5. From a standing position, draw hand down, stop at shin level.
6. From a standing position, draw hand down, stop at knee level.
7. From a standing position, draw hand down, stop at hip level.
8. From a standing position, point finger down.
9. From a standing position, stand still, no hand motion.

Set Up for Success

- 🐾 Become aware of the physical cues that you might be giving your puppy.
- 🐾 Practice being a tree while you give verbal cues so that you are not inadvertently giving physical cues.
- 🐾 Keep your hand out of your treat pouch until you have marked with “Yes!”
- 🐾 When working on fading, take small steps at a time and do not move to the next step until you are getting an 80% success rate with the step you are on.
- 🐾 Always make sure that your expectations are appropriate. If you practice inside, you will have to drop back a few fading steps if you move to a new location.