

## IS FOOD IMPERATIVE FOR SUCCESSFUL TRAINING?



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I get asked that question a lot

when I train puppies. The answer is no, it's really not all about food, but it is about reinforcers and making positive associations for your puppy as they form opinions about the world around them. Food is a primary reinforcer. A primary reinforcer is anything that your puppy inherently likes. Dog bowls are a human invention and convenience. When you fill your puppys bowl up three times a day, you are giving away hundreds of reinforcers for free. Have your puppy work for their kibble, and use the kibble to make positive associations. Every time you reinforce a behaviour that you like with kibble, you are making that behaviour stronger and more likely to occur in the future. You don't need to do this at every meal, but you should structure some meal times with training and use feeding kibble productively. Make sure, however, to adhere to the recommend daily serving.

Here are some ideas...

### ***Use kibble to make positive associations***

Hand feeding kibble to your puppy can be a great bonding experience. When your puppy realizes that the food comes from you and not the bowl, than you automatically become more valuable to them.

You can also hide kibble in the crate for your puppy to find and feed kibble in the



car to make these positive experiences. If there is another household pet, feed kibble to your puppy in their presence, feed kibble to sounds of thunder and rain, feed kibble to sounds of fireworks – anytime you pair something with kibble, your puppy is more likely to form a good feeling about it.

### ***Use kibble to train behaviours***

When hand feeding your puppy, only give kibble when the puppy is not biting at your hand. This is how we teach puppies to be gentle around our hands. If your puppy is biting at your fingers, you can feed the kibble out of your hand with your palm open flat and facing up.

Practise the name game. Say the puppy's name and give a piece of kibble when they look at you. You can also trade a piece of kibble for a toy. When your puppy is playing with a toy, offer a piece of kibble, take the toy, give the kibble, and then give the toy back. This will teach your puppy that it is no big deal to relinquish objects.

Call them to you and reward with a few kibbles, and reward outdoor elimination with a couple of kibbles. When your puppy is lying on their mat, toss them some kibble to reinforce their mat being a good place to be.

Use kibble with purpose. If you just fill up the bowl and leave it there all day for your puppy to graze, then you are truly missing out on so many opportunities to reinforce behaviours and make positive associations.

### ***Use kibble for husbandry exercises***

One of the most important things you can ever teach your puppy is that being handled is a good thing. You can use kibble effectively for this as well. Every time you massage their paws, massage their ears, brush their fur, or trim their nails feed them kibble. You cannot overdue it.

So if food is imperative to successful training, is it all about food? No. It's about reinforcers. Food is a primary reinforcer, and you can use it to create secondary reinforcers. Anytime anything is paired long enough with a primary reinforcer it can become a secondary reinforcer. A classic example of this is saying "good dog." If you pair "good dog" long and often enough with a treat, than "good dog" in itself will become a reinforcer for your dog. If you always reinforce the behaviour you like than that is what you will get.

Happy training!