

## **Counter Conditioning**

### **RECOMMENDATION THREE: Working on Counter-Conditioning/ Reduce Reaction to Guests Standing and Moving** ***(helping your dog form a positive association to potential "triggers")***

When you have a guest visiting, we want to set up training sessions where you work on pairing the "triggers" that may potentially cause a reactive response from Joey with calm/ positive/ happy emotions for Joey! We are doing this by setting up purposeful training sessions where you work on pairing the potential "triggers" (i.e. person standing up, opening the bathroom door, etc) with your marker word ("Yes!") and a high value treat.

The "triggers" we have identified for Joey so far have been things like a person standing up after having been seated for a while, someone opening the bathroom door, or a guest walking from one room to the other. You can set up training games where you pair these actions from the guest with a verbal "Yes!" and a treat scatter.

Remember, the goal is for Joey to *notice* the trigger (perhaps looking towards the person with perked ears), but not necessarily to *react* to the trigger. Our biggest goal is to change Joey's emotional response to "Happy!" when a potential "trigger" occurs, instead of putting him on the reactive defense! When a dog has positive feelings towards what was once a "trigger," they will no longer display reactive behavior towards that "trigger."

#### **The order of events should be:**

- Trigger (person standing up, sudden appearance of person, etc) occurs
- Dog notices
- You say "Yes!" and feed your dog a high value treat
- To help calm your dog, divert their attention, and to help break any staring or fixation towards the trigger, following your marker ("Yes!"), put the food by your dog's nose then toss it on the ground for them to chase and eat (or scatter several pieces of food on the floor). This technique utilizes a dog's natural instinct for using their nose to forage for food to take the edge off and encourage calm behavior around a potential trigger.

When you are working at an appropriate level for your dog, you should see your dog turning their head toward you after hearing the marker word ("Yes!"). If your dog is reacting (barking or lunging) or continues to hard stare or fixate on the trigger and does not turn back to you after the marker ("Yes!"), move further away from the trigger to re-set at an easier distance.

#### **The Benefits of Using Treat Scatters:**

Treat scatters in general are a very handy management strategy as you work on developing new behavior patterns with your dog. This technique is also a great mental enrichment activity for dog (sniffing for and scavenging for food)! For behavior modification, it utilizes a dog's natural instinct for using their nose to forage for food to take

the edge off and encourage calm behavior around a potential distraction or trigger. By scattering several treats on the floor, you are engaging your dog's nose and taking the focus off of how excited they are by a potential trigger or distraction.

