

HAND TARGETING

Hand targeting means your dog bumps your flat palm with their nose. It's a great skill for a variety of situations — to teach your dog to move over (great for location guarders), get off things, come to you, get on something (like into the car or onto the weight scale at the vet's office), heel and say hi to people they meet (great for shy or fearful dogs). It's also used as a foundation skill for games like "search & rescue," dog sports like treibball and agility, and tricks like closing a door. Here are the five steps to hand targeting.

- **Bump your palm.** Teach your dog to touch your palm as demonstrated. Hold your hand in front of their nose and wait for them to sniff or bump it. If they're not paying attention, you can say their name to get them focused, but otherwise don't give a cue at this stage. As soon as you feel their nose touch, praise them and feed them a tiny treat from the other hand. If they don't touch your palm, you can remove your hand and then present it again to get their attention, or you can fold a small treat in your palm with your thumb the first few repetitions. At some point, though, be patient and just wait. They'll catch on to what you expect.
- **Vary your position and add distance.** When your dog targets at least four out of five times in a row with your hand placed right in front of their face, begin to present your palm in different places and slightly further away — to the side of their face, down toward the floor, above their head, and a foot or two away — so they have to move to touch it. Always praise your dog the moment you feel their nose touch your hand, and quickly reward from your other hand.
- **Add the command.** When they target your hand at least four out of five times regardless of its position, introduce a command. (Suggestions are "touch" or "move.") Say the command first, then present your hand and wait for them to touch. When they do touch, praise them and give them a treat.
- **Don't reward your dog unless you've given the command.** When this is reliable, refrain from rewarding unless you have given the verbal command. That way your dog learns to touch your hand only when asked.
- **Vary your practice locations.** Practice different areas of the home, in the car, on the couch, on and off your dog's bed or other favorite resting spots, outdoors, and wherever else you'd like to use it.