



HUMANE SOCIETY
of sonoma county
Santa Rosa & Healdsburg

COMMITTED TO KINDNESS

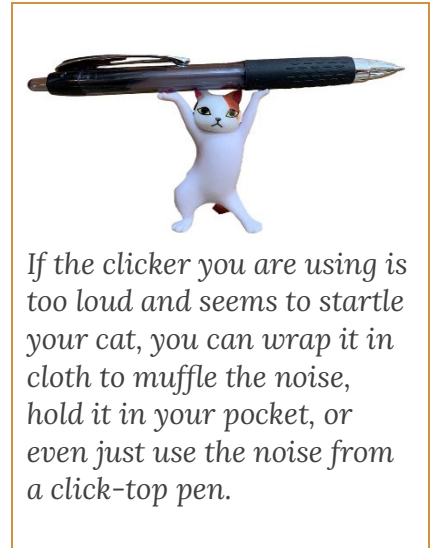


FELINE
BEHAVIOR
PROGRAM

CAT CLICKER TRAINING BASICS

Clicker training is a type of positive reinforcement training that involves using a sound- a click from a special tool called a clicker- that marks a specific point in time, helping you communicate that the cat you're working with is doing something that you want them to do.

How this works is that the 'click' acts as a 'bridge'- that is, it bridges the gap in time between when the animal performs the behavior you are seeking, and when you deliver the reward for that behavior (a treat, for example). If you are trying to teach your cat to 'sit', and you go to offer them a treat when they are sitting, it is likely that they will stand up and come towards you to get the treat. This can make it take far longer for them to understand what it is you are trying to ask them to do. Simply pressing on a clicker to produce the noise is a much faster thing to do, so you are able to mark the exact point in time that the behavior you are looking for is performed.



If the clicker you are using is too loud and seems to startle your cat, you can wrap it in cloth to muffle the noise, hold it in your pocket, or even just use the noise from a click-top pen.

The click should happen immediately AFTER the behavior is completed- so if you are trying to reward your cat for sitting, click as soon as their butt is fully on the ground!



Of course, you have to help your cat understand that the sound of the clicker means that their reward is on its way, otherwise it is just a meaningless noise to them. This is very easy to do. After you have figured out what reward you should use for your cat (more on that in a minute), simply click-and-reward several times in a row. So, if you are using a 'temptations' cat treat as a reward- click and immediately place a treat in front of your cat. Then repeat several times. Some cats may learn the association between the click and the reward in a single session; others may take several sessions. You can watch for signs that your cat is picking up on it, such as looking up at you/your hand when the click happens, licking their lips, or other signs that they are alert/expecting their reward to come as soon as they hear the click.



HUMANE SOCIETY
of sonoma county
Santa Rosa & Healdsburg

COMMITTED TO KINDNESS



**FELINE
BEHAVIOR
PROGRAM**

So what should you use for a reward? In animal training, rewards are typically referred to as ‘reinforcers’ because it is something that ‘reinforces’ the behavior, meaning it makes the animal more likely to perform that behavior again. Every cat is going to have their own individual preferences, and you will need to experiment to figure out what is most reinforcing to the cat you are working with. Reinforcers can be food, toys, physical touch, catnip, or anything else that is high enough value to your cat that they will be very happy to receive it. Typically cats who are food motivated are the easiest to train, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t possible to train cats who only find other things rewarding!

Starting to train

There are SO many things you can do with training, and it can seem overwhelming at first. We recommend you start small- picking something that your cat does naturally like sitting, looking at your face, or touching their nose to your hand, and use clicker training to ‘capture’ the behavior- simply click and reward when they do it. You will find that your cat will start performing the behavior you chose more often!

Training is meant to be an enjoyable and beneficial experience, both for you and your cat. Training sessions should be short- at MAX ten minutes long, but 1-3 minute training sessions are often the norm! Training can help shy cats gain more confidence, cats who overstimulate gain more self control, and is overall a very enriching experience no matter your cat’s personality.

Adding a cue

Once your cat is frequently engaging in the behavior you chose, you should work towards putting the behavior ‘on cue’- that is, getting the cat to perform the behavior when you ask them to. You can use a verbal cue, like saying ‘sit’, or a visual cue, like holding your hand in a loose fist above your cat’s head when you want them to sit.

You build the association between the cue and the behavior by presenting the cue right before your cat completes the behavior. So as your cat is sitting, right before their butt touches the ground, say ‘sit’, and then click and reward like usual. Repeat this many times, over time giving the cue sooner- until your cat does not even START the behavior until you give the cue. At this point,



A note on food-based reinforcers: it can often be helpful to use a specific treat that your cat loves for training, and ONLY training – do not give them that treat at any other time.



HUMANE SOCIETY
of sonoma county
Santa Rosa & Healdsburg

COMMITTED TO KINDNESS



cease clicking and rewarding if your cat does the behavior when you do NOT give the cue, and only reward the behavior when they do it when you specifically ask them to do it. Once your cat will reliably perform the behavior when you give the cue, the behavior is officially 'complete'!

Learning More!

This guide is NOT a comprehensive guide to clicker training; there is so much more to know! Using methods like targeting and luring, and shaping behaviors are all things you can accomplish with clicker training. Many of these words may sound like gibberish to you- if you are serious about clicker training we highly recommend you do some more research! There is a lot of information online, so just be sure that whatever guides you find are utilizing only positive reinforcement training, and are never 'forcing' an animal to participate in training or using 'punishment' as a training method. Training is meant to be FUN, both for you and your cat. You may have an easier time finding guides about clicker training involving dogs- well, guess what: while cat behavior and motivators for cats may be different than dogs, the basic principles of training and clicker training are the same between species, so it's totally okay to watch things about clicker training dogs and apply the same basic ideas to cats.

Some places to start-

A 15-minute video guide from Jackson Galaxy on clicker training: <https://youtu.be/9GQgiy9XN6I?feature=shared>

Karen Pryor has a few books on training and clicker training, and some information on her website: <https://www.clickertraining.com/library>

Chirrup and Chatter, owned by Tabitha Kucera, is a good one to follow on various social media. You can find the website here: <https://chirrupsandchatter.com/>

Clicker training information from Best Friends Animal Society: <https://resources.bestfriends.org/article/guide-clicker-training-pets>

