Training

Train a Dog to Ring a Bell

Many dog parents have taught their dogs how to ring a bell when they need to go outside. You can, too.

By **Debby McMullen, CDBC** - **Published:** March 25, 2025 0



The most important part of training your dog to ring a bell to go out is creating the association that ringing that bell means potty. Credit: Petra Richli | Getty Images

My dog Siri trained herself to ring a bell that I had on the doorknob of the door leading into the yard. She used to just go and stand next to the door and stare at me if I was in the room. One day, I heard the bell ring and went into that room to see why. She was waiting patiently by the door, so I let her out (after telling her what a splendidly smart girl she was, of course). She took that to heart and from that moment on, she rang the bell anytime she wanted to go out into the yard. Sometimes right after she had just come in. It was sure cute, though!

So, the first thing I want to mention is that, although many dog parents want to train their dog to ring a bell to go outside (usually for pottying purposes), this is the option that dogs most frequently learn to use for alternate purposes, especially if you combine pottying with walks or if you have a fenced yard. I am careful to use alternate terms for simply going out to enjoy the yard as well as for walks.

What Kind of Bell Will a Dog Ring?

The type of bell you choose depends on the door location and the height of your dog. Some dog parents choose the type that hangs from a door handle. Others prefer a button-style that sticks on a wall. I start by making sure that the dog sees the bell and hears its sound before initiating the training. Please determine that it doesn't frighten your dog beforehand.

Steps to Train Your Dog to Ring a Bell

1. If your dog knows how to hand target train (and they should!), that is your starting point. I often use a sticky note, like a Post-it, added to my hand when asking for the "touch" or whatever word cue you use for that behavior. I personally use a marker word (yes!) versus a clicker, but you can use either. Obviously, I immediately follow the marked behavior with a high value food reward.
2. Once the dog is reliably targeting the hand with the sticky note, I will transfer the paper to the bell/button. I still use my hand-targeting word cue at this point.
3. Once the dog is reliability responding to the request to target the note on the bell/button, I create a new cue word for such. I say the original targeting cue and add the new cue immediately afterwards. Eventually, I will just use the new cue.
4. Now, the most important part is creating the association that ringing that bell can result in you taking them out to potty. My go-to at this point is asking them if they need to go potty when they most likely do. Use your own term, obviously. They will usually visibly show you the answer is yes. Then you can request the bell-targeting behavior. If they don't respond to that cue then, you can ring it yourself while repeating the "do you have to go potty?" request and then immediately take them outside to take care of business.

Repetition with this process is your friend. However, be sure that you will be able to hear this bell anywhere in your home so choose your bell wisely. And remember to differentiate. Trips outdoors through the same door whether for enjoying the yard or going for a walk versus potty should get different word cues to prevent confusion.
Happy bell ringing!

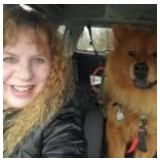
Like 16

Previous article

Livestock Guardian Dogs: Characteristics, Breeds, and Roles

Next article

Why Alpha Dog Training is Outdated



Debby McMullen, CDBC

Certified through the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, Debby McMullen specializes in behavior consultations with an emphasis on multiple dog households as well as aggression. She owns Pawsitive Reactions, LLC in Pittsburgh and ran her own Doberman rescue for nearly 15 years. In addition to offering seminars and webinars, Debby is the author of the "How Many Dogs? Using Positive Reinforcement Training to Manage a Multiple Dog Household."

LEAVE A REPLY

Logged in as Amy Lane. Log out?

Comment:

POST COMMENT

Search

Great News for Subscribers!

Whole Dog Journal is now digital-only. Online access to all subscriber-only articles and PDF's of past issues are included FREE with your subscription.

Learn More

Get access to
Whole Dog Journal
and SAVE.
Get it all for
less than
6 cents a day!
Save now

Featured Dog Food



Limited Ingredient Diet Turkey Entrée for Dogs

KOHA

Price/oz: $0.33

Ingredients: Turkey, Water Sufficient For Processing, Pumpkin, Turkey Liver...
View all

Resources

Dog Food Finder
Log In
View Cart
Customer Service
Whole Dog Journal: Who We Are
Reader Survey: What do YOU want to see in WDJ?
Share Your Thoughts
Online Account Activation
Subscribe

Dry Dog Foods

Canned Dog Foods

Freeze-Dried/Dehydrated Dog Foods

Whole Dog Journal

ABOUT US

Whole Dog Journal has helped dog owners and their dogs since 1998. Sensible dog care, health and nutrition advice and no-force training tips, Whole Dog Journal equips you with the tools to understand your dog, to encourage his physical and emotional wellness and to elicit his full potential and vitality.

Whole Dog Journal's experts are recognized veterinarians, dog trainers, groomers and dog food authorities. At-home care advice, recommendations of the best dog food for your dog, conventional veterinary medicine as well as complementary therapies, positive-reinforcement, training methods – you'll find it all at Whole Dog Journal.

Your No-Risk Guarantee of Satisfaction

If you ever decide that Whole Dog Journal or any book or ebook sold by Whole Dog Journal is not for you, email us by **clicking here** and we'll happily refund your entire purchase. Note that we may ask you to return any print book purchase before processing your refund.

© Belvoir Media Group, LLC. All rights reserved.