

# BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

by Debra Millikan

*Probably the most important thing a dog and handler can achieve together is a good relationship. Ninety nine percent of all dog training is building a relationship and learning to read the dog. The other 1% is the actual obedience and manners training.*

Negativity is the biggest killer of a good bond between dog and handler. Physical and verbal abuse of a dog is wholly negative. Even the word “NO” is negative.

Pamela Dennison says

“No” very easily escalates into a screamed “No!” which dredges up some very negative emotion from us, which is then transmitted to the dog. Remember – associative learning happens 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, whether you want it to or not...”No” is not a verb. It doesn’t tell the dog what you want him to do instead of what he is doing at the moment. “No” does nothing positive for the relationship between you and your dog”.

Focusing on what the dog is doing correctly is a better building block to a good relationship. Get rid of the counterproductive words from our vocabulary and we will be better bonded to our dogs. Pamela Dennison goes on to say

Focus on the Good Stuff! Too often we reinforce the dog by paying attention to him when he’s doing something “bad” (such as eating the chair) and never notice the 23 hours a day he’s actually doing good things. If we pay attention to the dog only when he’s “bad” then he will do only “bad” things.

A young puppy only has his owner to look to for comfort, food and shelter. It is therefore understandable that in the vast majority of cases a young puppy allowed off the lead (providing he is in a safe place) will generally follow his owner.

If during these off lead sessions owners can call their dogs to them, reward the behaviour and set the dog free again, a pleasurable experience will be had by the young dog, associated with the owner. Soon coming back will be a conditioned response that is an enjoyable experience for both. The association between dog and handler should ALWAYS BE PLEASANT.

So, what can be done instead of the nagging, nitpicking, screaming of “No”.

Dennison says

*There are three magic words to use instead of “No” – “Come”, “Sit,” and “Give”. Once your dog has learned what these behaviours mean, use them instead. If your dog has his paws up on the counter – “Come” works well. If your dog is digging through the garbage “Come-Sit-Give” are the words you should use. I don’t even use the words “leave it”, because that’s too much like “No”. “Come” works better because it gives the dog more direction.*

Remember:

## DOGS CAN’T DO “NO”

“No” can be many parts of speech but it can never be a verb – a doing word. There is far more value in re-directing the bad behaviour into good behaviour and rewarding the effort. This is bond building. This is positive and this will make the relationship between dog and handler the best thing since sliced bread! 🐾

*Quotes and information in this article come from Pamela Dennison’s book, The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Positive Dog Training, Part 3, Chapter 10, Pages 118-119*

