Glossary of Terms used in AVSAB Position Statements

AVSAB
American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior
www.AVSAB.org

Aversive:
Anything unpleasant (emotionally or physically) that is used to decrease an unwanted behavior. Examples of an aversive may include verbal reprimands, pushing an animal into a position (alpha rolls, dominance downs), threatening body language, shaker cans, spray bottles, citronella collars, leash corrections, choke chains, prong collars, or shock collars.

Antecedent Arrangement:
The antecedent is the situation or event that was happening immediately before a behavior. Antecedent arrangement involves manipulating the situation or environment to improve the likelihood of a desired behavior.

Capturing:
Identifying and rewarding behaviors that occur naturally and without a cue in order to increase the likelihood of the behavior being repeated. Examples of this include reinforcing a “down” behavior when the dog chooses to lie down on their own, or teaching a dog to “take a bow” on cue by reinforcing play-bow or stretching behaviors.

Classical Conditioning:
Any learned association between 2 events. In dog training, this is most often used to create a conditioned emotional response in situations where a neutral or negative stimulus is followed by a positive event. For example, putting on shoes and picking up a leash may elicit a positive emotional response because it predicts a walk. When the stimulus is perceived as negative, it is called counter-conditioning. For example, feeding pieces of chicken to a dog after a loud noise such as fireworks can help change the dog’s emotional response. Classical conditioning is also sometimes called a Pavlovian response.

Flooding Exposure Plans:
Flooding involves exposing a dog to a stimulus that is likely to invoke a fear response, and maintaining prolonged exposure to the stimulus until the dog stops reacting. This is the opposite of desensitization (see "Systematic Desensitization" definition below). Flooding should be avoided in dogs due to the risk of invoking a fear response.

Luring:
Using food or a toy to guide the dog into a position. The food may be held in front of the dog’s nose or face and then moved slowly away from the dog to encourage forward movement or moved to a position to direct the dog’s gaze. Moving food above and slightly behind the dog’s gaze will often cause the dog to sit down as they move their head to see the lure.

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Marker:
A marker is a signal to the learner to identify the exact moment in time that a desired behavior is occurring. A clicker or a verbal, "good" or "yes" are examples of markers.

Operant Conditioning:
A type of learning where the consequences that immediately follow a behavior determine the probability of the behavior being repeated. An example of operant conditioning in dog training is when we give a treat to a dog for sitting. This increases the probability that the dog will do this behavior in the future.

Reward-based Training:
Reward-based training involves giving your dog rewards for behaviors you want to encourage and removing the rewards for behaviors you don't want your dog to do. In addition to selectively rewarding behaviors you like, setting your dog up to be likely to do the preferred behaviors and giving enough information that your dog can learn what behaviors you like, are important components to a reward-based training plan. Rewards can be anything your dog enjoys (food, toys, play, attention) to reinforce a specific behavior. A behavior that is reinforced is more likely to be repeated.

Shaping:
A training technique where the trainer selectively reinforces natural variations in behaviors that are closer to the goal behavior. The variation in the learner's behavior will move toward the goal behavior as the trainer reinforces steps along the way.

Systematic Desensitization:
A gradual, controlled exposure to increasingly intense stimuli to increase the animal's tolerance of the stimulus. The starting intensity and rate of increase in the intensity should be slow enough not to provoke an appreciable fear response in the animal.

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