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LOOKING FOR MORE RELIABLE TRAINING RESPONSES FROM YOUR COLLIE? Today our breed expert looks at what you can do to achieve this

One of the commonest comments I will hear from owners is that their collie will respond well to a command in one setting – i.e. at home or in a training class – but then the dog's quality of response to the same commands will more rapidly deteriorate elsewhere, and usually in the face of greater distraction. Such as when they are out, and the dog wants to chase something, or goes up to another dog, and then becomes more 'deaf' to anything they say to them or ask them to do.

And the reason for this is actually quite simple. It has less to do with what you may view as simple 'disobedience'. It is down to the reality, instead, that the pull of the distraction your dog is facing is more powerful than the quality of the training they have been given to date; meaning the distraction is always going to win the battle for your dog's primary attention.

Once you understand this basic reality there is no point wasting energy getting cross or frustrated with your dog, which can often make them even less responsive to you. What you need to do instead is look at ways you can make your training so solid it will always take a higher priority in your dog's head, wherever you are.

THE TWO STAGES OF LEARNING

The first thing to appreciate is that there are two basic stages to teaching any dog any command or exercise. First comes the point where it is something pretty new to the dog, which the dog has to more consciously learn and remember, via the process of being constantly praised and rewarded. During this earlier phase of learning, your dog's response to a newer command may be a bit more hit and miss, because they are still having to make a more conscious effort to remember what it means and what they should do when they hear it.

This newer, and more consciously acquired, learning may also not be strong enough to survive some greater distraction a dog suddenly feels compelled to mentally prioritise instead; like feelings of anxiety, stress, fear or excitement, or other people or dogs approaching them, or something that triggers their chase instincts or desire to protect themselves. Because all these things come from the more SUB-CONSCIOUS mind of a dog instead, which is always more powerful than the conscious mind, being the home of all the most primal survival responses in any animal.

Thus the only way to make your dog's training more reliable or bombproof in any situation is to more thoroughly transfer what they have initially and more consciously learned (stage one) into their sub-conscious minds or thinking instead (stage two), via a process of constant conditioning – the second stage of learning, yet also the most important.

STAGE TWO: THE CONDITIONING PROCESS

My golden rules for making the training of all collies more bombproof in this way are 1) Start as early as possible (though collies can still be taught new things at any age) 2) Repeat and reward a desired action as often as possible to ever further ingrain it in the dog's mind 3) Once a response has become more reliable, make it even more solid by gradually upping the level of surrounding distraction your dog has to cope with while still responding to your desired command.

So in the case of 1, for instance, I will begin the teaching of exercises like down on the move/mid-chase recall when my pups are only months old. Keeping them on a line I will throw a treat ahead of them, then ask them to drop down before they have got to it (though they will have also been taught

a 'down' command before this), then immediately praise them and let them get the treat the instant they comply. Then I will do the same with toys, making it all into one fun game, until the process of dropping down on command – whether on or off the line – becomes ever more automatic for them.

Once the puppy goes out, I will also do the same training and games we began at home in all manner of different places, teaching them to get ever better at responding to them, no matter where we are or what else is going on around them, to the point where I feel it has got more totally conditioned into their brains. For if you do not do this, dogs may only respond in more limited contexts where you normally train – i.e. in class or at home – and will not be able to transfer the same learning/responses to any other context you place them in, especially when more strongly distracted by other things.

BETTER RESPONDERS

So ultimately we have to help our dogs become better responders, to our different commands or desires of them, via first better appreciating what may be standing in the way of them doing so. Between any dog and handler/owner there will always be a more constant battle going on between the strength of the training you have given them, and the counter-pull of forces inside the dog's head compelling them to behave in a different or more instinctive way. And the stronger these compulsions, the stronger and better our own training also has to be.

Meanwhile all aspects of raising and training Border collies appears in the SECOND book (red cover) of my BREED APART trilogy – ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS & LEARNING:

Carol Price collie books: In the UK from: <https://performancedog.co.uk/.../boo.../authors/carol-price/>

In the USA from: <https://www.dogwise.com/#> and

https://www.cleanrun.com/.../border_collies_a.../index.cfm In Canada from

<https://www.4mymerles.com/product-category/books/> In Australia from:

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