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USING LIFE REWARDS TO BUILD GOOD BEHAVIOR

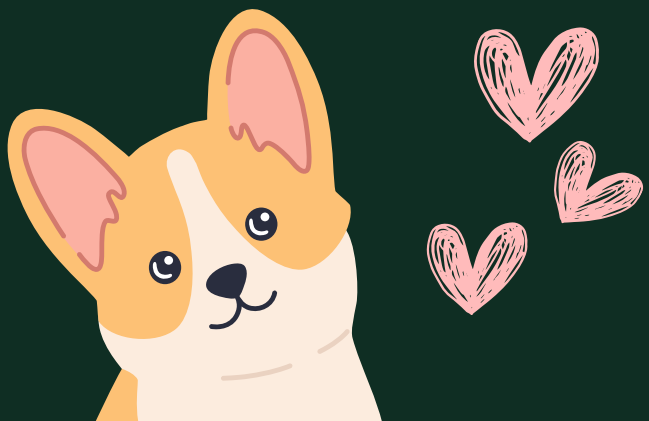
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WHAT ARE LIFE REWARDS?

Life rewards are all the fun, naturally motivating things your dog LOVES—no treats required! This does not mean we don't use treats or toys, it means we can be aware of activities our dogs love and use those shamelessly. These include:

- Going for a walk
- Jumping into the car for a ride
- Racing into the backyard for a good case of the zoomies!

THESE ARE REAL-LIFE EVENTS YOUR DOG ALREADY FINDS REINFORCING—AND THAT MAKES THEM POWERFUL TOOLS FOR TRAINING! PLEASE NOTE IF YOUR DOG DOES NOT LIKE THESE ACTIVITIES THEN THEY ARE *NOT* LIFE REWARDS.



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WHY USE LIFE REWARDS IN TRAINING?

Life rewards build real-world self-control by requiring your dog to work for the things they want. Instead of offering food treats, you're teaching your dog that polite behavior earns access to everyday fun.

Training with life rewards helps:

- Strengthen cue reliability like sit and down and the corresponding release cue
- Teach impulse control
- Build focus and eye contact
- Reduce pushy or overexcited behavior
- Make training a seamless part of daily life



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HOW TO USE LIFE REWARDS FOR TRAINING

To use life rewards effectively, your dog must perform a behavior BEFORE accessing the reward—and wait for a release cue to actually enjoy it.

The Flow

1. Approach the walk, car, or back door.
2. Ask for a behavior like:
    - Sit
    - Down
    - Eye contact
    - Sit or down with eye contact
3. Wait until the behavior is performed calmly. If necessary this can last one second. We all start somewhere.
4. Your dog must hold the behavior until you give your release cue. If they don't just don't open the door or pick up the leash.
5. Say your release cue (like “Okay!” or “Break!”), then give the life reward (open the backdoor to yard, start the walk: grabbing leash, open the car door, etc).

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EXAMPLE SCENARIOS

Backyard Zoomies

- Ask for a Sit with Eye Contact at the door.
- If your dog moves before the release cue, gently close the door.
- Try again calmly. When successful, say “Break!” and let the backyard adventure begin!
- Build up to having the dog sit and hold position while you open the door wide (practice on leash, to avoid epic fails, if you need to)
- PhD level you open the door wide and walk through before the dog is released.

Car Ride

- Before opening the car door, ask for a Down.
- Don’t open the door until your dog is calmly lying down.
- Once they’ve held it for a moment, say “Free!” and invite them in.
- As above build up to longer periods of duration and difficulty.

Walk Time

- Clip the leash only after a Sit or Eye Contact and immediately use your release cue.
- If they wiggle or jump up, pause and wait.
- Reward with the walk only after hearing your happy release cue and your dog being successful.

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NO BEHAVIOR = NO REWARD

If your dog doesn't offer the behavior (or breaks it early), no problem—the reward simply doesn't happen yet. This is clear communication. Calmly reset and try again.



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PRO TIPS 

- Use the same release cue every time (e.g., "Break!" or "Free!")
- Be consistent—don't let them self-release, not even one time, pinky swear!

- Keep your tone light and happy, especially when giving the release!

- Set your dog up for success—practice in low-distraction settings before real-world ones.

- If your dog fails it is just information, no need to feel frustration, just make it easier so your dog can be successful.

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FINAL THOUGHTS

Using life rewards teaches your dog that good behavior unlocks their favorite things. It's a fun, science-based way to create manners that matter.

And best of all? You'll see your dog start to offer good behavior just to see if it earns them something fun

Need extra help, email us LoveDogs@CourteousCanine.com today!

