

## SHAKE CAN

The “shake can” is a commonly used behavior modification help tool. This is not an actual deterrent to or cure for any behavior. It is a “help tool” that can aid you in modifying certain dog behaviors when used properly. It is essential that you fully understand the appropriate use of the shake can as relates to what you ultimately want to achieve.

The shake can or any similar noise mechanism is **ONLY** the “startle/stop” element of the behavior modification process for certain behaviors. When your dog is engaged in some behavior you do not desire, shake the can once. The point is to make a sharp, sudden, and unexpected **NOISE** that will “startle” your dog which causes them to “stop” the behavior. However, the startle effect and the stopped behavior are momentary, literally only 2-3 seconds. This is your window to **DIVERT** the dog’s attention to another behavior. If you do not divert them to another behavior or activity, the dog will return to exactly what they were doing.

Initially, the dogs do **NOT** connect the unpleasant, startling noise/sound as having anything to do with the behavior they were engaged in nor to they relate it to the behavior you divert them to. The dogs are only reacting to a noise they do not recognize and that startles them. What ultimately happens is every time the dog engages in a particular behavior, that unpleasant and startling sound occurs and they will begin to connect that it is something they are doing that causes the sound to “go off”. This is only one element of the behavior modification process and it will **NOT** be effective if used solely unto itself. You must follow through with the diversion element of the process which provides the dogs with a rewarding “alternative” behavior. You are altering/diminishing the value of the initial behavior and replacing it with another behavior that is more rewarding and does not cause the sound to occur.

Using the shake can or a similar noise mechanism allows you to react to an undesired behavior quickly without having to physically move toward or correct your dog. This is different than attempting to go to your dog and take something away from them or physically correcting them or yelling at them. When you move toward your dog they likely will run away. The dog may do this because they sense you are displeased or they may even think you want to play. For example, when the dog has something in their mouth you do not want them to have, they will almost assuredly run off with the “prized possession” or try to start a game of “chase or keep away” or avoid your displeasure, especially if you have not taught the “leave it” command.

Additionally, this approach allows you to modify their behavior without yelling at your dog or physically correcting them. Yelling at or physically correcting a dog is rarely effective in the long term and often will cause the dog to have an adverse reaction to you. They may become afraid of you or at the very least think they are best served by avoiding you. Neither of those reactions are what owners should want. The most effective behavior modifications are the ones that are “positively” reinforced and rewarded. Modifying behaviors through negative reinforcement is basically “aversion” training. Aversion

training is not the way I chose to train my dogs. Aversive methods can sometimes work with people, but people really do understand what is happening and why. The dogs do NOT understand any of that. Rather, they can only see negative and aversive methods as being threatening and/or frightening.

Any behavior modification process requires repetition, consistency, patience, and understanding to complete the process. If you are modifying a behavior and feel you are making progress, do not get overconfident or lax. When your dog first appears to be “getting it”, this is precisely when you should increase your efforts and consistency. During this phase, when the dog engages in the old behavior do not consider this as backsliding or the dog choosing to do something they know not to do. Rather, this is one more “opportunity” to help the dog eschew the undesired behavior and to reinforce the desired behavior. Each of these opportunities takes you and your dog one step closer to a successful end result.

The shake can is effective when used properly in part because the dog will not associate the unpleasant sound with you which makes it easier for them connect the sound occurs as the result of something they are doing (the undesired behavior). Ultimately, this process allows the dogs to make the connection and understand that one behavior causes something unpleasant to happen while another behavior makes you happy and they get rewarded in some way. Ostensibly, the shake can method makes the undesirable behavior a “self-correcting” behavior instead of a “self-reinforcing” behavior.

Most of the dog behaviors we seek to modify are natural, normal, and/or instinctual like barking, digging, playing with our feet, and chewing. These are the types of behaviors that are innately “self-reinforcing”. When we want to eliminate or modify these types of behaviors, we have to provide the dogs with “alternative/substitution” behaviors that are at least AS rewarding, and preferably more rewarding, than the previous behaviors.

The basic methodology of the shake can is the “startle/stop” reaction and diverted behavior action, so you can use a shake can or anything that makes a noise which will elicit the “startle/stop” reaction in your dog. There are some commercial shake can products, but you can make your own. Get a cola can or any metal container and put a few pennies, screws, nuts, or bolts in the can. It is the metal on metal sound you are creating. Cover the opening with duct tape or tape the container’s lid so it will not come off when you shake it.

#### SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES REGARDING THE SHAKE CAN METHOD

\*\* You only shake the can (or make the sound) ONCE, up/down. To elicit the “startle/stop” reaction, the sound must be a sharp, sudden, and unexpected sound. If you shake, shake, shake or continue the sound, it will not cause the startle/stop reaction and will not be effective.

\*\* DO NOT OVER USE THE SHAKE CAN OR NOISE. When you use this too often or too long at one time, the dog will eventually become “desensitized” to the sound and the

noise will become just another sound in their environment. At this point, this approach will cease to be effective.

\*\* You need to minimize the frequency you use the shake can method. Anything intended for emphasis or impact will lose its emphasis and impact when it is overdone. This means you will have to take additional measures to limit the opportunities for your dog to engage in the undesired behavior.

\*\* Try to make the shake can as inconspicuous as possible. Remember, we do not want the dog to associate the sound with anything except eventually “the behavior” you seek to eliminate or modify.

\*\* When your shake can or noise maker is not available, you can make a sharp “EHHH” sound yourself. In fact, I actually use the EHHH sound more often than the shake can when teaching and training my pups/dogs.

\*\* For some dogs, when a new or different noise occurs, they will bark at it or think it is the start of a play session. If your dog barks at the noise, you may still be able to use it as long as you are able to divert your dog to another behavior. This usually depends on the level of their bark response. If their bark is a startle response, then you may still be able to use the noise as long as their bark is a quick, startled bark. However, if the noise sets off a prolonged barking siege, then the particular sound you used is NOT the right one for this type of behavior modification process. You would need to try and find a different sound.

\*\* Try a different sound tone. In one instance, the regular shake can noise did not have any effect on a puppy I was training when he was barking or digging. I got a larger metal container and used a couple of bolts in it. The noise this made was a completely different “tone” and it worked!! The regular shake can noise worked for other behaviors like chewing or playing with my feet. There again, the sharp “EHHH” sound also worked for the chewing and feet playing.

\*\* When you use a sound to “startle/ stop” a behavior, immediately say, “No bark. Good, no bark”. “No dig. Good, no dig”, “No chew. Good, no chew”, or whatever command, and then quickly divert their attention to another behavior. You can have them go outside or run to the kitchen for a treat or toss their favorite toy or ball. Initially, the words will not mean anything, but after time, the words will be commands you can use at other times throughout their life.

\*\* If your dog thinks you are “playing” when you use the shake can noise, then chances are you are not using the sound properly or the sound itself is eliciting the play reaction. You will either need to modify the way you are employing this technique or you will need to find a different sound that will not elicit the play reaction.

\*\* You may want to consider having several shake cans or noise makers and place them around your home and even on your patio. This way, you will always have a shake can

close by should you need to use it. Do remember you can use the sharp “EHHH” sound if you do not have a shake can handy.

**\*\* NEVER** toss or throw any object (including the shake can or similar noise item) **AT** the dogs. Many people use various items to toss/throw **TOWARD** the dog as part of the “startle/stop” element. Unfortunately, owners frequently end up hitting the dog with the tossed item or the item bounces and hits them. This is totally unacceptable and should **NOT** occur. Beyond the chance of hitting the dog and possibly causing injury, throwing objects at the dogs can frighten them or make them feel threatened or insecure in their environment. I cannot see any positives that can come from throwing objects at any dog, but I have seen many negative results of this type action.

Do not expect the shake can or any similar noise maker to work miracles. Always remember that you are working to “modify” a behavior. Any mechanism such as the shake can is merely a “help tool/aid” to facilitate the “startle/stop” element of this type of behavior modification process. When dealing with any form of behavior modification, always use good sense and prudence. One of my behavior and training mantras is to “always err on the side of caution”! The results you get from any training or behavior modification programs will be directly proportional to how effective and consistent you are at implementing those programs and the “positive” effects the programs have on the dogs.

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