

Dear Dog Lover,

Even though it's still white out there, spring is around the corner! The days are getting longer, the sun has already the power to warm up the day, and we enjoy playing in the snow at nice temperatures. We're now again **able to use our outdoors fenced area**, to rent it out during the day, to take the daycare dogs out, or to let the Open Play Times' dogs run off more steam. Ask us for our rates, if you'd like to come and let your dogs use the field, and bring snow boots and coat. Also, please bring snow boots and coat if you come with your large dog to the Open Play Times.

**Please, for all students and visitors of the facility, note our CLOSING TIMES during the last week of March:**

We'll be gone Mar 21 – Mar 30. Our office and daycare will be open during this time on Mar 23 (Mon), 24 (Tue) and 27 (Fri). Monday, Mar 30, we'll be closed.

**CLASSES:** No classes on **Mondays**, Mar 23 +30. The new class starts April 6 with the seminar. No classes on **Wed + Thu**, Mar 25 + 26. We'll continue the classes on April 1 + 2. No classes on **Saturday**, Mar 28. The next agility classes start Apr 4.

**DAYCARE:** Daycare will be closed on Mar 25, 26 and 30 (Wed, Thu, Mon). Any **NEW** daycare dog needs to be introduced by Mar 20, to be eligible to come on Mar 23, 24, and/or 27. Regular schedule continues on Mar 31. All regulars can schedule daycare for any of the open days.

**OPEN PLAY TIME:** No Open Play Time on Mar 24 and 27 (Tue + Fri). We'll resume on Tuesday, Mar 31, unless we're getting way delayed flying back... We should be back by Monday evening.

**We have added some wonderful LINKS on our web page** to free training downloads, books about kids and dogs and a story about The Better Companion, featured in the Alaska Journal of Commerce. Please go to our web page and click on "LINKS" in the menu, to find out more!

**If you are interested in our Puppy II or Elementary School classes starting in May**, think about signing up for classes soon. We have the possibility to open an overflow class for each one and will only do so if we see a need, with enough signups.

**Our monthly story at the end of this email: What exactly does "positive reinforcement" mean?**

Enjoy those sunny longer days,

Claudia

**Below you'll find:**

- 1) Dates and times of upcoming classes
- 2) How to sign up for the classes
- 3) Information on the Open Play Times
- 4) This month's story: What exactly does "positive reinforcement" mean?

**1) DATES AND TIMES OF UPCOMING CLASSES:**

**Agility classes starting Apr 4<sup>th</sup>:**

Instructors: Claudia/Kat

These classes will run for six weeks, with a break on April 25<sup>th</sup> (for an agility trial), and end May 16<sup>th</sup>.

Saturday 10-11:15am (including set-up): [Agility Puppy/Beginners](#) FULL

Saturday 11:15-12:30pm (including set-up): [Agility Puppy/Beginners](#) FULL (we take waiting list positions)

Saturday 12:15-1:30pm (including set-up): [Agility Intermediate](#)

Lunch break: 1:30-2:30pm

Saturday 2:30-3:45pm (including set-up): [Agility Intermediate](#)

Saturday 3:30-4:45pm (including set-up): [Agility Advanced](#)

Saturday 4:45-6:45pm (including set-up): [Agility Advanced Trial](#)

**Behavior classes starting April 6<sup>th</sup>:**

Instructor: Claudia

All classes will run for seven weeks and end May 18<sup>th</sup>.

Monday 6:15-7:15pm: [Puppy 1 – Preschool](#) (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

Monday 7:30-8:30pm: [Foundation Class](#) (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

**Behavior classes starting May 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>:**

Instructor: Claudia

All classes will run for seven weeks, with no break and end June 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup>.

Wednesday 5-6pm: overflow [Elementary School](#) or [Puppy 2 - Kindergarten](#) (depending on where I get more sign-ups ...)

Wednesday 6:15-7:15 : [Puppy 1 – Preschool](#) (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

Wednesday 7:30-8:30: [Foundation Class](#) (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

Thursday 5-6pm: [Puppy 2 - Kindergarten](#) FULL

Thursday 6:15-7:15: [Elementary School](#) FULL  
Thursday 7:30-8:30: [Rally College](#)

### **Also coming up 2009:**

Our outdoor agility classes will start May 30<sup>th</sup>. They're already on the web calendar, and you can sign up for them at any time.

June: Monday eve P1/FC

July: P1, FC, P2, ES

July/August: HS (probably outdoors)

## **2) HOW TO SIGN UP FOR THE CLASSES:**

It's easy now!!! On our webpage [www.bettercompanion.com](http://www.bettercompanion.com), use the menu bar on the left. You'll find a button "Classes", with the subtitle "Registration", which brings you directly to the **one registration form for ALL classes**. After clicking "enroll" at the end, you'll get to the pricing and payment page, which explains all payment options, policies, and allows you to pay online, too. You can also check out the pricing page first, to learn about prices, payment and cancellation policies.

Puppy 1 Preschool clients, please remember you can also purchase the **Puppy School Packet**, including P1 and P2 class. You only have to commit to the seven weeks of P1 class, and will receive a voucher for P2, valid for 1 full year! For P2 voucher holders, the voucher will be your payment. After you fill out the registration form for P2, you can email me the number of the voucher, mail the voucher to us or drop it off at the facility.

**Reserve your spot!** Please note **our registration policy: Only the payment will hold your spot.** Spots are reserved in the order we receive payment for them. **Always sign up for the class you want to join**, even if it could be full. Only the payment will keep you on the waiting list, in case somebody else drops out before the class starts. **Your payment is never lost**, even if the class is already full. Your payment will 1) save you a spot at the class, or 2) save you a spot on the waiting list, or 3) can be carried over to a later class, or 4) can be fully reimbursed if I couldn't get you in the class you chose, or 5) can cause me to open an overflow class ☺. Just as a note: I sometimes get up to three dogs per class moved in from a waiting list before the class even starts. **We now can take credit card payments over the phone and at the facility.**

## **3) SOCIAL HOUR - OPEN PLAY TIMES:**

Come with your dog for one hour of dog play and dog owner social time. Each dog must be supervised by an adult handler, one dog per handler only. First-timers: bring your vaccination papers, we want to see them!

Fee: \$7 at the door, punch card \$35 for 6 visits. Vaccinated dogs only (5-way/DHPPi, dogs over 6 mo: Rabies, Bordetella). We also recommend having the dog dewormed or a fecal sample checked.

Every Tuesday AND Friday:

5-6pm: toy and small dogs up to 30#

6-7pm: puppies and adult dogs 40-60#

7-8pm: Adults over 60# (8 dogs maximum)

8-9pm: Adults over 60# (8 dogs maximum)

If the discrepancy between sizes/temperaments of dogs is too big within one group, we will either have a special section fenced off for the smaller/ more timid dogs of the group, or divide the dogs into indoors and outside play (if weather permits). This is to assure that everybody has fun and nobody gets overpowered.

We also give Canine Good Citizens a discount:

Is your dog a Canine Good Citizen? If your dog passed the CGC-test within the last 3 years, we'll give you a \$5 discount on your punch card for Open Play Times!

**You can check the web page [www.bettercompanion.com](http://www.bettercompanion.com) for info on classes, facility, and schedule, read testimonies from other students, print out the registration form...**

Or contact us by email or phone (see below).

#### **4) WHAT EXACTLY DOES “POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT” MEAN**

We know the word '*reinforcement*' in Police and Justice terminology, the Police being there to 'reinforce' the rules set by our law makers, or to bring 'more reinforcement', more man power. In dog behavior terminology, it's the same and still different. For the police, a 'reinforcer' is there *to strengthen* a response, which means to assure the bad guys will be caught and can't escape. For the dog, it will strengthen a certain behavior, to make it more likely *to occur again* in the future, which means to show a behavior more often because it got '*rewarded*'.

Rewards are the biggest part of positive reinforcement. Whenever we give the dog a reward to reinforce a certain behavior, we practice '**positive reinforcement**'. And rewards aren't only treats. The dog's rewards are plentiful: How happy is your dog to go for a ride, when you open a door for him (any door – house, car, yard...), when you play with her, or when he can chase a cat? Some rewards we can control, some the dogs take themselves, in so-called '*self-rewarding behaviors*', like chasing the cat or the car, or licking faces. Often we *unintentionally reward* our dogs for behaviors, like when we react to being jumped on or barked at. For many dogs any reaction is good and is better than being ignored. Then it seems like we can't get a behavior under control, and we don't even realize that we're still '*reinforcing*' the wrong behavior.

Rewards are also there to be taken away, or not granted, like when you don't open the door your dog is jumping up at, waiting for her to sit politely. NOT opening the door means 'negative punishment', a punishment done by taking away or not granting something the dog likes. In this dog learning terminology, '*positive*' means *adding something* and '*negative*' means *taking something away*.

Now playing with words, there're two more options to train a dog. 'Negative reinforcement' means to take something away to reinforce a behavior. A good example would be working with a fearful dog. If the dog is willing to take on a little bit of stress by coming closer to the scary person/object, the reward will be to take the scary person/object away. If a dog is scared of me at class, but willing to stretch his neck to me to check me out, I'll reward the dog overcoming his fears by tossing the treat AWAY from me, so that he can eat the treat and be relaxed. In another example, holding on to a wiggly dog, and letting go when she stops wiggling, shows also '*negative reinforcement*'. I'll take my hands away, as soon as you stop wiggling. You could also call this '*positive reinforcement*', if you see the reward in giving the dog freedom.

The last option is called 'positive punishment', something we don't like to use in our classes. Positive again means to add something, this time a punishment, trying to decrease a certain behavior occurring in the future by having an unpleasant outcome for the dog. Examples are leash corrections, scolding, slapping the dog, basically anything that could be called catching the dog 'in-the-act'.

How can we still train our dogs to behave well, even though we don't tell them what we don't like to see again? Do we just ignore the wrong behavior? The answer to this is 'management'. We need to be one step AHEAD of the dog, 'anticipating' the wrong behavior and 'avoiding' it in the first place. For the dog jumping up or chasing cars, that would mean putting the dog on a leash or holding her by the collar, to avoid the wrong behavior, then teaching them WHAT we WANT them to do, and now rewarding them with positive reinforcement for that new behavior.

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