

The Bucket Game

Empowering Not Overpowering

The Bucket Game – The Game of Choice

This fun and easy animal training game is designed to empower the learners. By creating an environment where our animals have choice and can communicate their intentions to participate.

The Bucket Game gives animals the ability to tell us:

- a. when they are ready to start
- b. when they want to take a break
- c. when they want to stop
- d. when they want us to slow down

[The bucket game](#) was designed and brought to the world by [Chirag Patel](#) – a training and behavior expert from [Domesticated Manners](#). Chirag encourages conversations between animals and people.

The bucket game can be used in many instances like grooming, vet visits, leashing, collar grabs, etc. and also as a confidence builder, phobia reducer and for fun.

What you will need:

- A bucket (size appropriate for your learner) - can be any small container
- Rewards (high value food or treats)
- A bed/mat or safe place
- Access to water
- A behavior to condition - touching, collar grab, nail trim, noise, etc.

Step 1: Teaching manners & impulse control around the bucket

- Place 20-30 pieces of kibble or treat into the bucket
- Place a mat or rug on the floor for your dog
- Start by holding the bucket out to the side. You can be seated or standing.
- Reinforce for looking at the bucket but maintaining some distance from it (not jumping or lunging at it). So, each time your dog looks at the bucket, Click or say Yes! and give him a piece of the kibble/treat from the bucket
- You can then put the bucket on the ground/chair and reinforce the animal for looking at it but not jumping toward it.
- Repeat until all the pieces in the bucket are gone. Then move on to Step 2

It doesn't matter what position your animal is in (sit/down/stand). What you are reinforcing is engagement with the bucket. If your dog paws at or lunges toward the bucket, pick it up and wait for your dog to settle before starting the game again.

Watch this video for a good example of how to start the game:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUF1IA9eLh4>

The animal is allowed to look around between focusing on the bucket – remember this is a game of choice and a conversation between you and them. No need to call them, shake the bucket, tug on lead etc. Let your animal make the choice to engage to participate in the training program.

Allowing access to a bed/mat and water – will give your animal confidence that they can take a break as needed.

Step 2: Start reinforcing longer eye contact

Begin to require longer eye contact with the bucket before you reinforce. Don't increase your criteria too soon or quickly as this may cause your learner confusion.

Watch this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeNzrRASuIY>

Step 3: Add the behavior you are conditioning (grooming, touch, etc)

This example uses an ear touch:

- Wait until he is able to focus on the bucket (remember it doesn't matter what position the dog is in – it could be a sit/down/stand).
- When he is focused on the bucket and able to hold his focus of a few seconds, I'm going to start moving my hand to his side (not touching him etc).
- At this point he can choose to continue to look at the bucket – and if he does he will be reinforced. If he looks at my hand or away from the bucket, he has communicated that he was uncomfortable, and I will stop – remember the game of choice.
- When he re-engages with the bucket, the game begins again. This time, don't move the hand so fast or far. If he is able to maintain focus on the bucket – he is reinforced.
- This continues, until the dog is able to have his ear examined.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVTuFchGFzM>

Important:

The game of choice, will only work, if you allow the animal to communicate that they wish to begin, break and stop the game. If the animal looks away from the bucket, the game breaks/stops. When they re-engage with the bucket, the game continues.

Putting ointment on and giving choice:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uB9zbplH_ms

Eye drops and choice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0sEkOcpfRg>