

What is Premack AKA Life rewards

The Premack Principle states that a high-probability behavior reinforces a low-probability behavior. That means that a preferred behavior can be used to reinforce a less favored behavior.

Example: If the dog sits, he then can go out the door or in human terms; 'if you clean your room you can go and play outside' or, 'eat your greens and you can have ice cream'.

This is sometimes called "Grandma's Law"

Why use this in dog training?

High-probability behaviors are what the dog wants or wants to do; low-probability behaviors are what you want your dog to do. To apply the Premack Principle in real life you need to think of the things that your dog wants. Example: playing with other canine pals, eating rabbit poo, rolling in grass, sniffing, swimming, having a belly rub, lying on your lap, going in the car, etc.

A few examples:

Walking on a loose leash (the veg) gets your dog to the park (the ice cream)

A nice short loose leash walk (the veg) gets a pee on the next lamp post (the ice cream)

Give me a 'check in' and you can go and sniff that new smell

Sit and "check in" with me (the veg) the back door will open (the ice cream)

Stop barking (the veg) and I will continue to make your dinner (the ice cream)

So, in effect, what he wants (the high probability behaviors) becomes dependent on him doing what you want (the low probability behaviors). Sometimes these things your dog wants are called 'life rewards'. If you look at life from a dog's point of view they may well ask themselves what's the point of complying with all your instructions i.e. 'shut up barking' (why), 'stop pulling on the lead' (why), 'stop jumping and barking to go out the door' (why). You can incorporate this principle into your training sessions by ensuring that your dog's every enjoyable activity that you control has a short training activity first.

Because of these associations, a dog begins to enjoy the behaviors you want him to perform as much as the things he wants to do. By this means, by dog training, the trained behaviors and the places and situations where it occurs become so enjoyable that they become self-reinforcing.

To get our dogs to respond reliably to our requests we use rewards but the best possible reward is what the dog most wants at that moment. In a training session what the dog wants is most likely to be the biggest distraction (or attraction) i.e. a smell on the floor, an escaped piece of cheese, the attractive little brown dog next door, etc. If you train your dog to understand the Premack Principle, once the dog grasps the connection, what was previously the distraction and was working against your training can then be used as the motivator and reward to reinforce the wanted responses in training.

