

K-9 CAPABILITIES TRAINING SERVICES

DETECTION DOG TRAINING

Trouble Shooting – Detector Dog Proficiency Problems

Problem #1

The detector dog does not respond to the trained target odor in training environment.

Possible Reasons

1. Odor was not available
2. Detector dog was not exposed to the odor
3. Fear of the environment
4. Detector dog is not confident in the target odor

Possible Solutions

1. Allow the odor to age a little longer before exposing the dog to the area
2. The dog search pattern may need to be improved to insure all areas of the element is covered
3. Dog may need some environmental conditioning before detection training can continue
4. Dog may need more imprinting with the target odor or target odor needs to be consistent with reward

Problem #2

The detector dog does not respond to the trained target odor in trial environment like it does in training.

Possible Reasons

1. Dog is not accustomed to searching strange locations and does not realize this is a search area
2. Training sessions are not conducted to mimic trials
3. Handler is more nervous at trials than training
4. Dog is not confident in the target odor hidden at trials that it is not use to in training

Possible Solutions

1. Conduct training in as many different locations as possible especially training sites that are real life locations parks, occupied buildings, operational vehicles etc.
2. Set training sessions up as trials as much as possible whenever possible
3. Replace fear with knowledge that you and your dog know what you are doing (TRUST YOUR DOG)
4. Use only pure training oils that is the same used at trials. Train with different amounts of target odors

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Problem #3

The detector dog responds to non-target odor in training environment

Possible Reasons

1. Dog has acquired a confound as what is the target
2. Handler is cueing or keying the dog
3. Training is too advanced for the level of the dog

Possible Solutions

1. Eliminate confounds in training
2. Run more blind hides or off leash searches in training
3. Set training up that gives a dog a Challenge to improve but not so advanced to cause the dog fail

Problem #4

The detector dog responds to non-target odor in trial environment

Possible Reasons

1. Dog is not confident in what the target odor is
2. Dog has acquired a confound in training
3. Handler is cueing or keying the dog
4. Handler talks the dog into an alert
5. Handler misreads the response of the dog

Possible Solutions

1. Imprint target odor to dog correctly. Conduct more proofing during training
2. Set up training to eliminate confounds
3. Handler needs to run more blind hides or off leash searches in training
4. Trust the dog if he is saying nothing is in the area move on to another area
5. Handler watches videos of searches to get the full sight picture of how their dog responds to target odor

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Problem #5

The dog's intent to search is poor and unenthusiastic in training environment

Possible Reasons

1. The training exercise is above the dog's ability
2. The handler is using the same concealment areas
3. The training exercise does not present a challenge to the dog
4. Training exercise is too long

Possible Solutions

1. Training must be set to the level of the dog's ability
2. Dog needs to be exposed to multiply concealment locations to challenge them
3. Set up training to challenge the dog without failure
4. Shorten training exercises to end when the dog still wants to find one more hide

Problem #6

The dog loses intent to search or has poor and unenthusiastic in a trial environment

Possible Reasons

1. Dog is not ready for this level of trial
2. Dog is distracted by outside source
3. Dog is not having a good day
4. has an unknown medical issue the day of trial

Possible Solutions

1. Conduct more training before entering trial over the dog's ability
2. Introduce outside distractions in training to teach the dog not pay no attention to them
3. Pick up the motivation before and during the search
4. Make sure the dog is fully healthy before hand

CONFOUNDS

Confounds – Definition = to take (a thing) mistakenly for another. (to confuse)

Confounds dealing with detection dogs are mistakenly introduced during training resulting in the dog searching for non-target odors and responding to locations not containing target odor. Confounds can arise from the handler, the dog, training areas, packages of training aides, amounts of odor used in training, locations of hides, other training aides, or any other “thing” consistent with target odor.

Handler or Assistant

If the same person makes all the hides for the dog during training sessions, the person’s scent will be confounded with the target odor. In order to avoid this type of confound allow a variety of people to make hides during your training sessions. If training in a group take turns making hides.

Dog

When one dog gives an alert to a location saliva and other odors are released on a hide location. If you run your dog behind other dogs every time you train then dog odor will be confounded with target odor and your dog will start hunting this odor instead of the target odor. To avoid this type of confound use a different run order every time you train giving everyone’s dog a chance to run first. You can also run search areas alone without any other dogs.

Training Areas

If the dog trains at the same location or the same set of vehicles is searched each training session, the location or vehicles will become a confound; possibly resulting in the dog not searching for target odor in other locations. To avoid this type of confound then train in as many different locations as possible. I recommend getting into training group and each person uses each other’s training areas

Amounts of odor hide

If every hide that is made is of the same amount of odor such as two q-tips then the dog will only respond to hides of two q-tips and not one or three etc. To avoid this confound make all different amount of odor in each hide for your dog to find in training. This will give your dog more confidence in what his target is.

Packaging of target odor

Since we have to package the target odor in something to prevent fringe odor and use the same package for every hide this packaging will become a confound causing the dog to search for that package such as the use of metal tins every time. To avoid this confound place your q-tips in a number of different packages such as metal tins, plastic containers, rubber containers, and anything else that will prevent the target odor from direct contact from the hide location.

Hide Locations

Location confounds result when hides are consistently made in the same locations (i.e. always making a hide in the trash can during every training session). The dog will begin to respond to those

locations even if target odor is not present. To prevent this confound vary the locations of hides during training sessions. Allowing different people make hides during training session will also help with this confound. Another way to prevent this confound is to allow the dog to search several like locations with only one containing target odor such as 5 or 6 trash cans in the same room.

The dog must learn that the only thing consistent with it's reward is target odor whether it be food, toy, or simple praise. Eliminating all confounds in your training sessions will get your dog more confidence in what it's target is and will result in more accurate alerts and prevent them from passing a hide and not responding.

Example of Training Session Ensuring No Confounds

7 total hides, 2 Birch, 2 Clove, 3 Anise

- 1st hide 1 Birch q-tip in plastic container hidden by Todd in box 3 of 6 in 1st row of container area
- 2nd hide 3 Clove q-tips in rubber tube hidden by Todd in box 1 of 6 in 2nd row of container area
- 3rd hide 2 Anise q-tips in metal tin hidden by Bob in locker of interior area
- 4th hide 10 Clove q-tip in plastic box container hidden by Bob in desk drawer of interior area
- 5th hide 6 Birch q-tips in metal tin hidden by Sam in front bumper of blue vehicle of vehicle area
- 6th hide 1 Anise q-tip in glass tube hidden by Sam in passenger side front wheel area of vehicle area
- 7th hide 30+ Anise q-tips in plastic tube hidden by Bill under wooden bench of exterior area

In each hide the only thing consistent is the target odors of Birch, Anise, and Clove The next training session should change everything again.

Building off leash independence in detection dogs

In order to have a detection dog work off leash independent from the handler the dog must feel comfortable in working at greater distances from the handler with out the security of a leash connected to them. Some dogs adapt to this easier than others. The dog must also have full confidence in what the target odor is. I always start a dog off leash and put the dog on leash during the last phase of basic detection training. This will give the dog this independence from the beginning and be part of his foundation to work off leash. Dogs that are started on leash become more handler dependent and independence must be built in them to work off leash. They are several ways this can be done. One way is an exercise I like to call Point to Point Fence Line.

Point to Point Fence Line exercise:

Make 1 – 2 hides of a large amount of target odor on a fence line aprox. 3 – 4 feet off the ground so the wind can make the odor travel airborne.

- Have a start line before the 1st hide and a finish line after the 2nd hide.
- In a rapid pace run the dog from the start to finish when the dog picks up airborne odor drop the leash and keep moving towards the finish line. If the dog sources the hide you or an assistant can reward the dog. If the dog stops tracking odor and keeps moving with you turn around at the finish and work back to the start until the dog gets use to sourcing a hide away from you.

This exercise also helps teach a dog to track airborne odor to source. Another exercise I use is an interior search called Breaking the Umbilical Cord.

Breaking the Umbilical Cord exercise:

In a large search area place several hides at the furthest point in the room of large amount of target odor. When you enter the room cut the dog off leash and then give him his search command. If the dog goes to searching stay at the door. When the dog stops searching, take a step or two towards them and give the search command again. When the dog goes back to searching move back to the door. If the dog stops searching take another step or two towards them and give the search command again. Slowly a step or two at a time move into the dog until they start searching and as they begin again keep moving back towards the door until you are able to stay at the door and your dog is comfortable searching the whole room away from you. Once the dog feels comfortable searching without you, move with the dog in the search areas where you are able to reward them in a timely manner.

Another exercise I use is open field search:

In a secure open field place a hide of a large amount of target odor in the center of the field. Turn the dog off leash as if he feels they are just there to play. As the dog runs around the field and responds to airborne target odor praise them as if you didn't know that hide was there. Once the dog sources the hide run over and reward the dog in your normal fashion. This builds good independence in the dog to respond to odor anytime they smell target odor.

Whether you like working your dog off leash or on leash independence builds confidence in the dog and confidence in the dog will correct a lot of unwanted issues such as environmental distractions and handler influence (cueing). If you prefer to work the dog on leash once you have built up his independence then you can work him on leash and still give him freedom to independently search with out direction.

HIDE PLACEMENT FOR DETECTION DOG TRAINING

To understand hide placement, we must first understand different types of hides. The following is a list of different types of hides I use in training:

- **Motivation Hides:** Easy basic hides that are intended to motivate the dog or keep them motivated and build drive.
- **Recovery Hides:** Very simpler to motivation hides basic and easy hides used after a hard training session or series of harder more advanced hides intended to bring fun back to training so the dog does not get burned out.
- **Conditioning Hides:** These are sometime referred to as training hides used to teach the dog something such as search patterns.
- **Proofing Hides:** Can be target or non-target hides used to ensure the dog is only responding to target odor.
- **Correction Hides:** These are hides set up to correct unwanted behavior through self-corrections.

All hides will fall into one of these categories. Depending on what the goal of the training session is what type of hide is used. Hide placement is the key to successful training a detection dog. We should develop a hide placement plan prior to each training session to ensure this success and we reach our exercise goals. Random hide placement will not advance the dog it will only keep them proficient at the level they are at. When I come up with a hide placement plan for a training session I think about the dog teams that will be coming to training and what type of hides they need to improve. Next, I look at the search area and pick out locations within that search area that fit that type of hide. Before I place the hide, I look around that area to ensure there is no environmental issues that may interfere with the purpose of that hide such as air vents, fans, etc. that may cause unwanted effect of the odor cone. Depending on what type of hides we want to make we may want to seek out these locations where the environment may disturb the scent cone. Once the hide is placed we should not remove or relocate it unless it is absolutely necessary unless we are doing a training exercise that requires a hide to be removed such the fringe odor exercise. The hide is then allowed to age for the desired amount of time for that training session.

Variations in hide placement: There needs to be consistent variations in our hide placement to prevent a hide location confound. When we have people making hides for our dogs they need to understand this and change hide locations frequently. I also recommend using multiple people to make hides for us.

Variations in odor amount of hides: To ensure our dogs are locating all amounts of target odor our hides must vary in the amount of odor they are producing. Hides need to have a wide range of available odor to the dog. In narcotics detection this is done by weight of the hide. In nose

work it is done by the number of q-tips used. 1-3 q-tips is not a wide enough range. The range needs to be at least 1-30 tips or more. We must also take into account the location of the hide and how much odor the location will release into the air that is available to the dog. If the hide is placed in more of an air tight location, then it will not release as much odor as a hide in a more open-air location of the same size.

HANDLER PROOFING

Handler proofing- To train the detection dog in a manner that the handler has no influence on the dog's performance.

Cueing or Keying – Term used to describe when a detection dog looks for confirmation from the handler that they are at target odor or source.

Cueing is a symptom of a deeper issue in most cases it is where the dog is not confident in what target odor is.

The first step in handler proofing is to build confidence in the dog that they have a complete understanding of what target odor is and what target odor is not. Dogs start looking for confirmation from the handler when they are unsure of what their target is. The dog must be fully comfortable in the search environment as well this can be done through environmental conditioning.

The next step is to condition the dog to ignore what the handler is trying to convey to the dog. We can accomplish this through training that convinces the handler there is a hide in certain locations that's really not there. After a few repetitions of this, the dog stops trusting the handler and utilizes its own capabilities to locate and source target odor.

After the dog is conditioned to ignore the handler, the handler can purposely increase cues in training to further season the dog to ignore the handler. Once the dog fully understands this the dog will be easier to read and in a lot of cases, pull the handler to the hide. The dog must truly understand that the handler has no clue to where the hide is and it is the dog's job to show the handler where the hide is, not the other way around.

“Trust your Dog” Theory

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As handlers we hear the phrase “trust your dog” from day one. Every trainer and handler gives this phrase as advice through out the world in every discipline of detection work. We don’t truly and completely start to trust our dogs until we remove all the crutches we have in our training. Crutches come in many shapes and forms. The 1st crutch we remove is handler known hides. We start running unknown hides or blind hides when the handler starts to trust the dog. Most handlers will stop there, but once we start running blind hides we develop another crutch and that comes from the trainer or helper that made the hides. The handler and dog will start to relay on this person for help too often and too much and may even cause the dog to key or cue off of that person as well as the handler too. Just like the dog will pick up on keys or cues from the handler that makes their own hides, the handler and/or dog will do the same to a 3rd party in the room that has made the hides. This is when we need to introduce double blind searches where no one in the room knows where the hides are. As handlers we need to also turn off our brain and relay on the dog’s nose. A lot of handlers look at a search area and try to pick out where they think the hides are. I counter this by introducing blind starts where the handler does not see the search area until the dog is already searching the area. This prevents a handler from over thinking an area and make per determined hide locations. I also see handlers that work two dogs develop a seasoned dog crutch where they rely on the older dog they “trust” more and always want to work that dog first to find the hides. I try to counter this with my handlers by making run orders putting the young dog 1st in order. If it’s a long training session such as an all-day event I will switch up the order. Handlers may also pick up crutches from areas their dog excels in such as a favorite search area like vehicles or a certain training site. To eliminate this crutch, we must train in all areas and at different locations all the time. Unfortunately, we can’t pick and choose the search areas or training site we want or don’t want to work our dogs in. If you will train more often on the areas your dog is weak in then they will perform better in those locations. We even develop a crutch with our eyes in reading our dog’s responses. Now reading a dog’s response with your eyes is very important and every handler should learn how to do this. We don’t need to rely on this solely. Dogs make all kinds of sounds we can hear when they respond to target odor. Breathing changes, a lot will exhale or sneeze these are all sounds a handler can pick up and read as a change in behavior just like your eyes see bracketing, tail wagging, or dog coming to dead stop all of which make sounds too. I realized this when I used to have a trainer tell me “Ray Charles could have read that response”. I started having handlers search a dark room once they have learned to read the dog with their eyes so they learn to read them with their ears as well. Once they know how to do both

communication from the dog to handler increases tremendously. The more we remove crutches from our training the more trust we build in our dogs. Once true trust is built then a transformation takes place where the dog becomes the teacher and the handler becomes the student. The dog will teach you more about what they need to advance them in training than any human dog trainer can. We develop a true scent picture of how the dog views scent and how we can adjust training to fit his needs and the capabilities are endless.

Taking your handling to the next level by “Trusting your dog”

Level I – Blind Hides: Where the handler is working unknown hide locations. This prevents any keys or cueing from the handler and starts to build trust in the dog.

Level II- Blind Starts: Where the handler is unfamiliar with the search area before they give the dog the search command. This keeps the handler from over thinking the problem and trying to figure out hide locations instead of just letting the dog find the hide on its own.

Level III- Double Blind Hides: Where the handler is working a search area and no one in the room knows the hide locations. This prevents keys or cues from a 3rd party. This forces us to start trusting the dog.

Level IV- Blank Search Areas: This is a search area with no hides. Just as important as it is to know when your dog responds to target odor it is important to know when there is no odor present in an area.

Level V - Dark Room Searches: Where the handler is working a blacked-out room and can't see the dog. The handler has to depend on the sounds to be able to read the dog's response to odor. This allows the handler to be able to read the dog not only through sight but by sound too.

Level VI- Realistic Search Areas: This is a search area that would mimic an area or environment the team is expected to work in. This allows the handler and dog to get a good feel of realistic searches and start bridging the gap between training and real searches. Real searches for nose work is trial environments.

Level VII- Unrealistic search areas or non-task search areas: This is a search area that more than likely the dog will never encounter or at least not on a regular basis. This gives the dog a wider range of environments to work in and if the dog is asked to search an unfamiliar area he will be use to search strange unusual locations.