

The “Meds” Command

Typically, the child who receives one of our pups will routinely carry a bag or pouch with some necessity. Examples include Epi-pen for an allergic child or maybe just some sweets for a diabetic child. Any rate, the dog must reliably search out the object and reliably give it to the child.

Teaching this process must occur in logical steps. The first steps that must be mastered before starting the “Meds” training are “Come” and “To Me”. These were covered in previous sessions, but deserve review here. Above all else, your dog must come when called. I cannot over-stress the importance of this, both for obedience and for the dog’s safety. When the dog comes reliably, the “To Me” command can be introduced. This is a special case of “Come” and is used when the dog has an object in their mouth that you want to have given to you. Be sure not to use the “To Me” command when they do not have something to give you. The next step is to become proficient with the “Give” command. We want no tugging performance here. If the dog does not give readily, let go of it and turn your back. After a few moments, turn and try again. The dog soon learns that tugging does not yield praise or a treat. We also don’t want the dog to drop the object. If they do, repeat, the “Meds”, “To me” and “Give” commands, until they pick it up and give it to you. With a little practice, the “Give” should become an automatic part of the “To Me” command. Only when proficient with these commands should the “Meds” training start.

The first step in the final process is to pick a command name. I have chosen to use “Meds” because of its generality. In the final training with the child, a parent, or child, might wish to use a more specific term. That is OK, as transfer to a new command name is usually easy. However, for now, we will use “Meds”.

The next step is to find a suitable training object. A cloth pouch or small purse will work. Now, we want to make the job as easy as possible for the dog. We do this by giving the object a strong, unusual, but pleasant odor. There are probably other good candidates, but I have chosen cloves. I simply place one, or two, whole cloves in the bag/pouch.

Now we make a game of it. Start by just tossing the bag for the dog to retrieve. Say “Meds” as you toss it and say “To Me”, if necessary, to have them bring it, and give it to you. By the way, reserve this object for this exercise only. Don’t let it become a toy. When proficient with this, put the dog on a down stay where they can’t see you. Then hide the object in some easy to find place. Give the “Meds” command and dog should search it out and give it to you. Because of the importance of this procedure, I often give a treat, as well as praise for a job well done. Gradually hide the bag in more difficult places. However, we do not want the dog to fail in the early training. Should you be over zealous in you hiding place and the dog is having trouble, it is OK to coax him to the location, or give whatever hints necessary for him to succeed. What we want to see here is persistence. A dog should be able to maintain a hunt for a couple of minutes, if necessary.

When you are reasonably confident that the pup has mastered the concept, you should gradually start using the real Meds package. You should try to play this game with him, at least, once per week forever, as dogs need repetition to maintain perfection. Bandit never tires of playing this game. On command, he

will go into our bathroom so he cannot see where I am hiding it, and stay out of sight until I give the Meds command.