

Training The Airscent Dog To Use Voice Contact:

This training should only be started with dogs that have very confident airscent skills. For many dogs, voice contact without airscent is startling and gets a defensive reaction.

FIRST: Set up a short trail or area search with victim *down wind* of the searching team. The handler should be stopping (as in a real search) to use his whistle about every 2 minutes. The victim will begin to shout for help when the victim hears the searcher's whistle. The victim will also call the searcher on the radio and 'indicate that they have begun to shout. And the victim will continue to shout for help about every 5-10 seconds. The handler/searcher must stop when whistling and listen for a response. Don't make eye contact with the dog while you listen – in fact turn your head away and give body language of listening. You may need to call your dog back to your side, and sit before blowing the whistle to reinforce the need for the dog to listen. The dog will begin to stop and listen also after enough repetitions of listening while searching produce results – meaning they learn that they can also use their ears to find people.. When the handler gets close enough to hear the victim shout he cues the dog verbally by saying, "Do you hear that? What do you hear? It is very important that the victim be down wind because we don't want the dog to get airscent. The handler can whistle or shout at this point to the victim and the victim should shout back. The handler cues the dog toward the shouts for help again. When the handler is **sure** the dog has actually heard the voice of the victim, then the handler runs toward the sound. The handler is showing the dog that the shout is important. Most dogs have a defensive response to a shout when it comes from a source they did not smell first. They don't know that they can search by sound and think this shout is "foreign" and possibly dangerous. So the first learning to be accomplished is to show the dog that you want to find this sound. Even if your dog starts to try to find the shouter the handler should be actively searching as though they didn't have the dog. The victim is still shouting every five seconds for help. This helps desensitize the dog to the surprise of the voice and becomes a lure for handler and dog to follow. When you get to the victim give the dog lots of play reward. Don't be surprised if the dog is uncertain with the victim. Just play and act like you do for the airscent find.

SECOND: Set up a second short problem after crating your dog for 30 minutes or so. In a different location, set up the problem exactly as you did the first time only the victim should be UP WIND of the dog. Once the victim hears the handler's whistle they shout help every 5-10 seconds. Again the handler cues the dog when he hear the victim's shout, but gives the dog a chance to begin the search. Because the victim is upwind the dog should have scent help to reinforce the voice information. If the dog is still hesitant, the handler should enthusiastically run into the victim and reward again. Your dog hasn't made a mistake if he doesn't use the voice contact. He simply doesn't yet understand that this is allowable information. The handler continues to teach the dog by his own enthusiastic searching. The dog is learning that this team wants this kind of victim also. When the dog begins to stop with the handler each time he calls/whistles and begins to listen for voice contact then you know that the dog has added voice information to his search tool bag. With each successful training the handler can begin to devise more complex voice contact finds. Continue to alternate putting the victim down wind or up wind of the dog and start to include contamination and track information.

The handler and their field assistant should always have compass ready when they hear shouting so that their first response is to get a bearing.

Don't be surprised if your dog goes in the wrong direction when it hears a shout as echo can be a huge part of the problem solving. Just have the victim keep shouting until you and the dog figure out for sure which direction the sound is coming from.

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