

## Obedience Commands

Every dog must know five basic words to live a happy life. The words are: **heel, sit, stay, come, and down.**

**SIT AND STAY** - Use three fingers pressed together in a curving motion over the dog's head. As the dog follows the motion of your hand and his rump sinks, say "sit" and then praise. Use a leash to teach the "stay". Start from heel position, dog on your left, leash straight up and down, with a slight amount of tension on the lead. Hold the taunt lead with your left hand and bring your right hand down in front of the dog's face. As your hand nears the dog's eyes, flash it open, fingers closed and say, "stay." Step in front of the dog. If he moves, give a zip on the leash and repeat. If not, praise and return to the heel position. Go halfway around your dog, return, and go all the way around. Say "stay" each time you leave the heel position and flash the stay signal in your dog's face. Now, loosen the tension on the lead and lengthen the distance that you go away. Repeat these steps until you can walk completely around your dog using a 5-foot leash while the dog stays put.

**HEELING** -It is the dog's job to listen for commands. When you give a command or reprimand, lower your tone, not your volume. If the command is for an active exercise, pitch your voice higher (heel, come, etc.). If the exercise involves movement, up your voice, if it doesn't, keep voice low. When heeling, keep dog on left side. Keep hands palms down on the leash. Use a metal training collar, keeping it up high around the dog's neck with the rings of the collar placed under the ear closest to you. Step off, saying, "Sport, heel", stepping with the left foot. If the dog lunges or lags, give a quick snap on the leash, not a restrained choke action. When he is in a "sit" next to you, give lots of praise.

**COME** - Start with a solid sit-stay, using a 6-foot leash. Say "stay", walk directly away, no backing up, keep an eye on him in case he breaks the stay. If he does, wheel quickly and flash the hand and "Stay" signal. If the dog doesn't re-park him-self, return, scold and try again. When you get to the end of the lead, turn and face dog. When you're ready him, bend all the way down, open arms wide, smile and call, "Sport, come!" Pitch voice higher a bit. If the dog doesn't launch, give a firm snap on leash to enforce command. If it does, do not repeat the word "come" or say "c'mon". Offer encouragement as dog walks toward you -"Good boy! You want the dog coming into you happy and quickly. As he comes, raise your body, guiding gently into a sit (in front of you). Make eye contact. Praise a bit but not too much (no playing here). Do 6-7 recalls each day, a longer distance each time.

**DOWN** - Teach from the heel position with the dog seated. There is a spot on the dog's back that is sensitive. Pressure here folds the dog into the down position. Put left hand on dog's shoulder blades and, with thump and index finger, trace down the scapula to where spinal column begins. You will find an indentation into which your thump and finger will fit. The 'secret spot' is the upper thoracic vertebra. Push gently forward and down on this spot. Most dogs will go down readily. If dog doesn't down quickly, grasp one or both paws and ease him into down position, saying "down," and pointing the index finger of right hand to the ground. When the dog stays down and you can walk around it then you are ready for the long down. Insist on at least 30 minutes! At the local obedience class, downs will be 3-5 minutes because that is the amount needed for getting a title. Avoid placing the dog underfoot or in passageways for practicing the down. Be fair to him while he is learning.

**PROOFING**- Set up situations to distract the dog. He must be committed to following commands, knowing he has to obey. Proof against moving, going out of sight, food and friends. Throw a magazine in the air, say and give the "stay" just as you throw. *Out of sight*-Flash the "stay" and leave room. Listen carefully. If he moves, return and place dog in his spot. Repeat going out of the room, longer each time. *Food* - Put a glass of water and a cracker on the table with dog sitting or downed. Eat slowly, slurp the water, correcting when necessary. Some people do not like being mauled, goosed or jumped on by your pet. Teach dog to sit to get petted by strangers when they come into your house or meet on the street. Have a stranger pet them in the downed position as well.

Your release word after training is over is a loud "okay", then praise your dog! **Sit, Heel, Come, Stay, and Down.** These are "gifts" you give your dog, so that the two of you work happily together as a team.

## Preliminary Obedience Training

It is essential for every dog, no matter how big, or small, or whether you want to show, or work, or just play with, to have basic obedience training. If you want to go beyond the basics, that's great. But at least do the basics. One way to think of it is that without basic obedience, you and the dog don't speak the same language so how can you communicate? But with basic obedience, you can tell the dog what you want it to do and it will understand you and do it. Another way to think of it is getting your dog to be a Good Citizen: it doesn't jump on people, or run off, or indulge in other obnoxious behaviors - because it knows what you expect of it.

### **Obedience classes**

Find a good class and attend it. Many places have puppy kindergarten classes; this also helps socialize your puppy. Do 10-minute training sessions every day. And if you like it, keep going. You'd be amazed at all the activities you can do with your dog once you and the dog learn the basics! Training is fun and simple if approached that way. Enjoy it!

### **Around the house**

Puppies can be started far earlier than many people believe. In fact, waiting until your pup is 6 months old to start training it the worst thing to do, and will be the cause of a lot of problems. Start right away with basic behavior: use simple, sharp "no's" to discourage chewing hands or fingers, jumping on people, and many other behaviors that are cute in puppies but annoying when full grown. Don't be severe about it, and praise the puppy \*immediately\* when it stops. Tie the puppy down in sight of people eating dinner to prevent begging and nosing for food (if you put it in another room, it will feel ostracized and begin to cry). If your puppy bites and scratches you when playing, give it a toy instead. Give a \*No\* and \*off\* when the puppy bites you and have him sit. The other side of the coin is immediate praise when your puppy stops after a "no". You may feel like this is engaging in wild mood swings (and you may well get odd looks from other people); that's all right. You're making your wishes crystal clear to the puppy. It also needs positive as well as negative reinforcement: how would you respond if people only ever yelled at you when you did something wrong?

Introduce things in a fun way without "corrections" just to lay a foundation for formal training later on. Formal training, demanding or exact, is not appropriate at this stage. Instead, concentrate on general behavior, getting its attention, introducing things that will be important later in a fun way, and some other preliminary things, such as discouraging it from lagging or forging on the leash (but not making it heel!). In sum, lay a good foundation for its future development and behavior. Puppies at 7 weeks are too small for a collar and leash and to grasp the idea of walking on it. Give it a couple of weeks. When the puppy starts to run away from you, it's time!

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