

Teaching Your Dog To “Stay”

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Definition

“Stay where you are in the same position (sitting or lying down) until I release you.”

Practical Uses

Sit-stays and down-stays are very valuable to help control your dog's activities. They can also help build your dog's confidence.

How to Teach “Stay” Without a Clicker

“Stay” has two components: the stay and the release. They are **always** performed together.

Stay: Have your dog sit. Tell him “stay” in a firm voice while putting your hand in front of his face. Wait just a couple of seconds, then *calmly and quietly* reward and praise. **Release:** After you have rewarded your dog for the stay, give a release word, such as “free,” “okay” or “at ease,” encouraging your dog to move out of the stay position.

Comments

Always reward the stay first, then release your dog. If you reward your dog after you have released him, you will reward the release, not the stay.

Choose a release word or phrase and **always** use it. While “okay” is a natural word to use, it is better to use a word or phrase that is not so commonly heard in everyday conversation, such as “at ease” or “free dog.”

If your dog breaks his stay (moves out of position before you told him he could), *gently* return him to the original spot, have him stay again for a shorter period of time, then reward and release. The idea is to be able to reward your dog. If you ask for too long a stay and he moves, he gets no reward.

When your dog has learned to stay with you right in front of him, you can gradually begin to increase the time of the stay or the distance you move away from him, **but not both at once!** For example, you might gradually increase the length of the stay to 5 seconds, then 10, then 15. When he reliably holds a stay for at least 30 seconds while you stand next to him, you can start adding distance. Tell your dog “stay,” then take one step away. After 5 seconds, step back to reward and then release. Gradually increase the length of the stay while you're one step away, then repeat this process from two steps away. *Take it slow!*

While training a “stay,” ALWAYS return to the dog to reward and release. DO NOT call your dog to you out of a stay or he learns that breaking the stay gets rewarded. Instead, use “wait” if you plan to call him to you.

Teaching “Stay” With a Clicker

You can use a clicker to teach “stay” as an extension of the sit and down behaviors. “Sit” in this method means “sit until I release you” and “down” means “down until I release you.” Have your dog sit or down. Gradually build the amount of time he must remain in position before you *click and treat, then release. The sound of the clicker signals the end of a behavior, which also may release the dog.