

Teaching The 'Settle'

Week 1

At a time when your dog is tired and you have time to sit down for 5 minutes or so (such as watching TV in the evening) and when the household is fairly quiet. Pop your dog on a lead, grab a few treats and go and sit down. Set a timer so that you know when 5 minutes is up. Either tether your dog to the chair you are sat in or stand on the lead. Have the lead fairly short so that the dog can't wander too far away and find things to amuse himself with.

Now just wait. Watch your dog out of the corner of your eye and when he lies down, quietly and carefully drop him a treat. Try to do this so that he doesn't know where the treat has come from. He'll probably get up and start looking for another treat. Ignore this and wait for him to lie down again. When he is settled (and not staring at you for a treat as that is not the relaxed and settled state that we are after). Drop him another treat without him noticing. Repeat until your 5 minutes is up.

Repeat the following day or at another time when your dog is tired and you have the time to just sit for 5 minutes. This time wait for 1 second after the dog has laid down before you drop a treat. Repeat until your 5 minutes is up.

Next session, you are going to wait until he has been laid down for 2 seconds before you drop a treat, and the session after than 3 seconds and so on. By the end of the week, you should be able to have you dog laid calmly for 10 seconds between treats.

Week 2

The aim this week is to get to 20 seconds between treats, building by one second at a time.

Repeat week 1's exercise but this time you will start from 10 seconds between treats and build by one second in a session so that by the end of the week, the dog will be laid calmly for 20 seconds between treats

Remember to only drop the treat when the dog is relaxed and looking away from you not when he is staring at you intently, we are trying to get him to relax.

Week 3

The aim this week is to get to 30 seconds between treats, building by one second at a time.

Repeat week 2 but building from 20 seconds to 30 seconds between treats. Only add one second at a time in a session.

Remember to only drop the treat when the dog is relaxed and looking away from you not when he is staring at you intently, we are trying to get him to relax.

Week 4

During the last few weeks, you will have been working on getting your dog to settle quietly at your side/feet. We are going to continue to build this by having the dog settle for a longer period before the treat is delivered. Last week, you should have managed to get to 30 seconds between treats.

You now need to continue building the time between treats until your dog will settle for 5 minutes with a treat only being given at the end of this period. Gradually build up to this time between rewards by building one second at a time until you get to 60 seconds and then increasing by 5 seconds to 2 minutes between rewards and finally in 10 second increments until you get to 5 minutes. Only increase by one second in any particular session, so you will have a session where you increase the gap to 31 seconds and another session where you build to 32 seconds etc.

Remember to only drop the treat when the dog is relaxed and looking away from you not when he is staring at you intently, we are trying to get him to relax.

Week 5 onwards

Now that your dog will settle for 5 minutes, you can gradually increase the amount of time that he is settled for by 10 seconds at a time (remember to start a new session for each increase in time). Gradually increase until the dog can settle for up to 30 minutes.

We have only been asking the dog to settle when he is tired, we now need to teach the dog to settle no matter how energetic he is feeling and we also need to teach him to settle in different places.

Repeat the 5 minute settle process in different environments (in the park, at the vets, in the car etc.).

Repeat the 5 minute settle process when the dog is slightly less tired than previously, then in his normal energetic state and then when you have got him excited after playing games with him.

Gradually your dog will learn to settle whenever and wherever you ask him.

Building on the 'Settle'

You also need to teach your dog to settle when out and about. There are two approaches that can be used (but probably wise to teach both). You can teach your dog to settle on a mat and you can teach your dog to settle at your feet.

Settle at your feet

This is basically the same as teaching the pup to settle at your feet when you are sat down, but this time you will be stood up (or sat down) with the lead under one foot. Work through the programme above and train for the dog to settle when you are sat (park bench, folding chair etc.). Start off in an area where there are few distractions (and with you a long way from them), gradually working closer to the distractions and increasing the distractions so that your dog will settle quickly at your side regardless of what is going on around you.

So you may start off in a quiet area with a couple of people walking 100m or more away from you, building to several people walking passed you at 1m distance; to children running passed; to being able to settle next to a football game or an enclosure of livestock/wildlife; to being able to settle calmly next to a flyball/agility ring or a gundog scurry for example.

Settle on a mat

We are going to teach the dog to go to a mat on cue; not as a punishment but as a way of keeping the dog settled whilst we are busy doing other things. The exercise is trained in two separate stages; the actual going to the mat; and the lying down on the mat and once both behaviours are fluent, we will add them together

The send to the mat

1. Place a mat or blanket on the floor, directly in front of you. Be ready to click as soon as you place it on the floor if the dog glances at it. Look at the mat/blanket and watch your dog out of the corner of your eye.
2. Click your dog for glancing at the mat/blanket and reward by tossing the treat away from the mat/blanket.
3. After your dog has eaten his treat, he will come back to you. If he looks at the mat, again click and treat. Repeat this stage until he has looked at the mat three times in a row.
4. The next stage is to wait until he moves very slightly closer to the mat. If you are really observant, you may notice him just shift his weight off one paw, click for that and reward.
5. Now we need him to lift his paw. When he does, click and reward and repeat twice more.
6. Now we need him to place his paw a little closer to the mat. Just wait patiently until it happens, don't try and lure him with food. Let him work out what you want. When he does, click and reward and repeat twice more.
7. Now we wait until he puts one paw on the mat. Click and reward. Repeat twice more.
8. Now we wait until he puts 2 paws on the mat. Click and reward. Repeat twice more.
9. Now we wait for 3 paws on the mat (some dogs go straight to four paws on the mat, don't worry if this happens). Click and reward. Repeat twice more.
10. Now we wait until he puts 4 paws on the mat. Click and reward. Repeat twice more.
11. Now we take a step back from the mat and wait for the dog to go to it and put all 4 paws on it. Click and reward. Repeat twice more. Remember to throw the treat away from the mat so that the dog has to get off the mat to get the reward.
12. Take 2 paces away from the mat and click and reward your dog for 4 paws on the mat. Repeat twice more.

13. Continue one step at a time until your dog will go onto his mat from around 10 paces away.

Note that we haven't added a cue yet, and we won't until we know that the dog can reliably go to his bed and lie down. As we haven't yet added the lie down to the behaviour, we'll avoid giving a cue just yet. All we are doing is getting the dog happy to go away from you to his bed/blanket.

Lying down on the mat

1. Stand right next to the mat and ask him to lie down. Click and reward when he does. We really want a relaxed down rather than a sphinx down so we may have to 'shape' this behaviour. When you dog lies down on the mat, put the treat on his nose and use it to turn his head towards his shoulder. As he follows the treat he should shift his weight allowing him to take a more relaxed position (he'll shift his hips to one side). Click and reward.
2. Repeat until the dog is offering you this relaxed down rather than the more formal down position. Add a different cue. As this is the position we want him to take after we've sent him to the mat, you could use 'on your mat' as the cue for this position
3. Gradually increase the time the dog remains in a relaxed down on the mat. Try to reward only when the dog looks relaxed not when he is in an alert position looking at you. Increase the time in 1 second intervals until you get to a minute and then in 5 second intervals until you get to around 5 minutes.

Once your dog is happily settling on his mat, you can then take a step away, call him to you and then wait for him to go to his mat and lie back down. Repeat several times, then move back one pace. Continue to increase the distance until your dog will go on his bed and lie down from around 10-15 paces. You can now add the cue of 'on your mat'.

You can then gradually add distractions such as asking him to go to the mat when you are eating, when you have guests around etc. Remember that as the distractions increase that we need to decrease the distance/make it easier so that the dog succeeds and then gradually build distance and duration back in again. Always keep your tone light, never harsh as being sent to the mat is not a punishment.

Once your dog can carry out this behaviour indoors, your need to repeat in different locations; start in a quiet environment first and once the dog happily settles on his mat, gradually increase the distractions. The aim is to have your dog settle on his mat happily regardless of where it is placed and what is going on around him. Take your time adding distractions and always reduce the distance you send the dog to the mat and/or the time he has to remain on there when you move to a new location and/or add distractions.