



Teaching Your Dog to “Settle”

Definition:

“Relax, be calm.”

Practical uses:

“Settle” should be more relaxed than a “Down-stay” or “Sit-stay”; the dog need not maintain a specific position. You can use it in the waiting room at the veterinarian, or when you are out on a walk and stop to chat with a neighbor.

How to teach:

- Sit in a chair with your dog on leash. Step on the leash about 12-15 inches (for a medium-size dog) from where it hooks to your dog’s collar. The dog should have just enough leash length to allow him to sit, stand, or lie down, but not enough to allow him to jump up on you.
- Ignore the dog. It is his job to decide how he is most comfortable with the length of leash you have given him. Most dogs will decide to sit or lie down after just a few minutes. As long as the dog is not struggling against the leash or pestering you, click/treat (C/T).

Adding the cue:

When the dog starts to offer the desired behavior (relaxed body position, not pestering or struggling) in response to your standing on the leash, say a cue word, “settle.” Do this about 20 times over two different training sessions.

In your next training session, start by saying the cue word as you step on the leash. Gradually “back up” the cue until you are saying it before the dog performs the behavior.

Moving on:

- Gradually increase the length of time your dog must “settle” before you click. Work up to about 30 seconds of relaxed body postures/non-pestering. Increase the time gradually, just a couple seconds at a time, over multiple sessions.
- If the dog begins pestering before you C/T, ask for the “settle” again, but reward for a shorter duration so the dog succeeds. Make sure the dog has at least five successes before you try a longer duration again.

- Variable Schedule of Reinforcement – you have been using a “continuous schedule of reinforcement” which means the dog gets a treat every time he performs the behavior. Now you’re ready to move to a variable schedule of reinforcement, meaning he only gets a treat sometimes. Only C/T every third, sixth, second, fourth, or tenth time he performs the behavior.
- Once your dog is performing the behavior reliably on cue (i.e., he will do the behavior at least 90% of the time when you give the verbal cue) on a variable schedule of reinforcement, you don’t really need the clicker any more for this behavior. You should still reward your dog often and variably with praise or a food treat, but you don’t need the clicker any more -- until you’re ready to teach a new behavior!

Tips:

- Start with a two- to three-second settle and work up to five minutes or so. For dogs under six months of age, a two- to three-minute settle is long enough.
- For longer settles, praise or treat (don’t click) several times during the settle, but have the dog maintain the settle.