

## Self-Control Exercises

### Leave It and Take It

1. Crouch in front of your dog with a treat in your hand. Hold the treat in a closed fist right in front of your dog's nose with the palm of your hand facing the dog.
2. Hold the treat steady and ignore everything your dog does until it removes its nose from your hand. Do not use your "leave it" cue yet.
3. The moment your dog removes its nose, say, "take it" as you open your hand allowing your dog to take the treat.
4. After a few repetitions, your dog will target your hand and immediately pull back realizing this is the only behaviour that works to get the treat. As soon as this realization occurs you can add the "leave it" cue as you present the treat in your closed fist. You'll notice your dog becoming gentler and more controlled as it takes the treat from the palm of your hand.

Open your hand immediately when your dog removes its nose, whether it's sniffing the floor to see if you dropped the treat or is distracted by something. Correct timing is important for your dog to learn that pulling back from your hand is the way to earn the treat.

### "Leave It" Cue



1. Harley sniffs the treat



2. Harley removes his nose

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### “Take It” Cue



3. “Take it” - Margaret Ann rewards Harley with a treat



4. “Leave it” - Harley learns that “leave it” means to remove his nose to earn the treat

Once your dog understands “leave it,” require it to wait for the count of two before rewarding it with “take it.” When your dog is controlling itself for the count of two, increase the length of time by a couple more seconds each time. As you achieve success, gradually increase the length of time until your dog is waiting for one minute before earning the treat. At this point you’ll mix up the length of time your dog needs to wait so that it cannot predict when the treat is coming.

Although Dr. Ian Dunbar recommends using a treat to entice your dog to let go of you, many dogs will quickly realize that biting you results in treats. If at any time your pup refuses to let go of you, quickly remove your hand from its mouth and leave the room at once.

I’m constantly sticking my hand in the puppy’s mouths in my training classes and I do this to test their bite inhibition. If a pup is biting too hard it’s important to increase the bite inhibition exercises to prevent long-term problems. These exercises should continue throughout a dog’s life to ensure superior control and prevent the bites from becoming harder as it ages.

During my early studies I was taught that you should never rough house with a dog but I disagree. As long as you follow Rules for Games, playing with your dog will increase your dog’s self-control and your control over the dog. However, if you play without rules you could be headed for trouble.

## Self-Control Exercises

### Watch Me

Getting your dog's attention off what it's focused on and back on you is the first step to stopping unwanted barking. The purpose of the "watch me" exercise is to teach your dog to focus on you, on cue.

When a dog begins training it usually has no attention span and can become distracted at the worst possible times. When a dog becomes distracted in public, owners often lose control as the dog lunges and barks at the approaching dog, person, etc. Not only is this embarrassing for the owner, it can cause fear in the approaching dog or person and creates behavioural habits that can escalate into aggression. Punishing the dog creates an unpleasant association with the handler and the approaching dog or person making the problem worse.

Teaching impulse control and alternative behaviour is a great way to prevent and solve this problem. Focus, concentration and self-control must be taught and strengthened as you would strengthen any muscle in weight training. If you can't get your dog's attention, you can't teach it anything, nor can you ask it to do something it's already been taught. Teaching your dog to watch you on cue is taking a big step toward being able to control your dog in public.

1. Hold a treat in front of your dog's nose allowing it to sniff the treat.
2. Move the treat from the dog's nose to your eyes.
3. The moment your dog's eyes connect with yours give your "YES" reward marker and reward your dog with a treat.



Greg shows Sahara a treat then lures her focus to his eyes

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4. Feel free to crouch in front of your dog and hold onto its collar at the beginning if it's very small, young or jumping around excitedly.
5. When your dog makes eye contact with you every time you move the treat from its nose to your eyes add the "watch me" cue before moving the treat.
6. When your dog makes eye contact every time you give the "watch me" cue, require your dog to hold the eye contact for the count of two before saying, "YES" and giving the treat.
7. When you're successful with the count of two, require your dog to hold eye contact for the count of four, then six, eight etc. gradually increasing its focus and ability to concentrate.
8. Take this exercise on the road by asking your dog to "watch me" at different locations along your walk, beginning with short eye contact when there are no distractions and gradually increasing the length of contact and intensity of distraction as your dog is successful.

### **Note**

- If your dog breaks eye contact when you expand the length of time, shorten your time requirement to ensure success. When your dog is successful with your last goal, you can once again ask for more.
- Remember to give your dog a play break after a maximum of three repetitions.
- The body movement of luring your hand toward your eyes will eventually become your hand-signal for "watch me."
- When asking your dog to do anything when distracted, begin with mild distractions at a distance then gradually increase the intensity by shortening your distance or increasing the volume. If your dog is unable to focus on you, the intensity of the distraction is too high. When this occurs, go back to your last point of success and proceed more slowly. Let your dog tell you by its success when it's ready to take the next step.



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### Offered Sit

The purpose of this exercise is to teach your dog that sitting makes good things happen and that it doesn't get anything it wants until it is sitting.

Don't use the cue to sit for this exercise, as this exercise requires your dog to choose to sit without being asked. This way, the dog learns to sit when it wants anything and creates good manners.

1. Allow your dog to sniff the training treat then stand up and wait. The moment your dog's butt hits the ground give your reward marker "YES" and reward your dog with a treat.
2. Step away from your dog so it stands to follow you and repeat.

With a few repetitions your dog will realize that sitting makes good things happen.



Margaret Ann ignores Harley when he jumps up and rewards him when he sits

## Self-Control Exercises

### Basic Stay

The purpose of this exercise is to teach your dog that the “stay” cue means to hold its position until you ask for something else or release it.

We’re going to make your first stay exercise easy to achieve to set your dog up for success.

#### Hand Signal for Stay

Your hand signal for stay is like the policeman’s stop signal, with the palm of your hand facing the dog.



#### Stay Hand Signal

#### Release Cue

Your stay is only as reliable as your dog’s ability to hold its position until released. For this we need to create a release cue to let your dog know that it’s ok to get up.

I use “all done” as my release cue. Feel free to use “relax,” “at ease,” “go play,” something in another language, etc. Avoid release cues such as “ok” or “good dog” as these are words too often used during regular conversation. This has a diluting effect on the cue and can result in unintentionally releasing your dog. Choose a release cue that’s unique so that when your dog hears it, it’s clearly identified as permission to move out of the stay position.

Perform the following procedure in a quick, fluid sequence to avoid giving your dog enough time to think about getting up before it’s rewarded and released.

## Self-Control Exercises

1. Standing in front of your dog, ask it to sit followed by your “stay” cue and signal.



Sit



Stay

2. Without waiting, immediately reward your dog.
3. Release your dog using your release cue.

### Note

- This exercise is the foundation of your dog's stay for the rest of its life. If you succeed now, your stay will become longer and stronger, and something you'll be able to use in real life situations. If your dog gets in the habit of breaking the stay before it's released now, it'll be more difficult to create a reliable stay later. Remember, if you build a house on a weak foundation it will not stand.
- Always remember to reward your dog while it's holding the stay, before releasing it – never after. If you reward your dog after the release it'll continue to get up thinking that's the behaviour that earned the reward.
- Set your dog up for success. Only ask your dog to perform a stay it's capable of achieving. If you set your dog up to succeed it will. If you set it up to fail it will. For example, although you may have achieved a ten second stay during your previous session, if your dog is not feeling well or is highly distracted during your next training session, this may not be a reasonable request. Like us, dogs have good days and bad days, and times when they're more distracted than others.

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- Be aware of your environment, how your dog is feeling, and adjust your expectations accordingly.

If your dog is not feeling well, is experiencing physical discomfort, is in pain, stressed, anxious or fearful, your expectations should be limited to only what's necessary at the time and what the dog can successfully achieve. Under these circumstances I tend to avoid training unless absolutely necessary. For example, when my dog is not well she may require a visit to the vet clinic – these visits are always used as opportunities to train; but if my dog is not up to it we simply avoid other dogs and people. In cases such as these, treating the illness problem is your first concern.

If your dog is exposed to a new distraction or the distraction is more intense due to volume or proximity – it becomes increasingly difficult for your dog to concentrate on you and respond to your requests.

When choosing your goals take the following into consideration:

- How your dog is feeling
- Your dog's ability to focus and concentrate at that particular time
- Your location

New locations – even choosing to work on the opposite side of the room must be viewed as a new distraction. Just walking out your front door adds a myriad of new and potent distractions for your dog to process in the form of sights, sounds and smells. Keep in mind that your dog has four times your hearing and can smell things you're unaware of.





## Self-Control Exercises

### a. Always allow your dog to set the pace

Only take the next step when the previous step is easy for your dog. Make sure your next step increases only one of the following criteria at a time and is a small increase to once again ensure success.

- ✓✓ Length of your stay
- ✓✓ Distance from your dog
- ✓✓ Distance from the distraction
- ✓✓ Volume of the distraction

### b. New distractions in the environment

Once your dog is able to focus with a particular distraction at a distance, you can gradually increase the intensity of the distraction by shortening your distance or increasing the volume.

- If your dog breaks the stay, go back further than your last point of success and progress more slowly to ensure success.
- When working on short stays, always take a play break after three repetitions of the exercise. Once your stays are thirty seconds or longer, take a short play break after each release to help your dog clear its mind.



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### Stand Up and Move Away on the Down Stay

The purpose of this exercise is to teach your dog to hold the down stay position as you stand and move away from it.

1. Crouched in front of your dog, using your cue and signal, put your dog into the down position.



2. Practice your “leave it” cue to teach your dog to keep its nose off the treat while in the down position.



3. Give your cue to stay and either signal with an empty hand or quickly remove the treat from in front of your dog's nose to avoid luring your dog up with the treat.
4. If your dog reaches toward your hand go back to your “leave it” cue. When your dog relaxes into the down position, give your reward marker “YES” and give it the treat.

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5. Repeat this until your dog is relaxed in the down position.
6. Gradually change your body position until you are standing in front of your dog, reward and release your dog using the release cue you chose for the sit stay exercise. With each small change in body position, reward your dog for not standing up with you.



Norma Jeanne's holding her hand signal higher requiring Scruffy to look up without getting up



She rewards Scruffy each time she makes a change and he holds his position

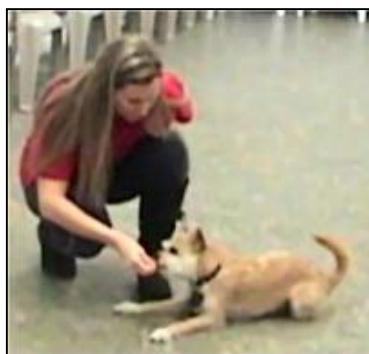


She is now holding her hand signal even higher requiring Scruffy to look up while holding his down position

Note: Norma Jeanne is not holding Scruffy down by the collar – she's simply using one finger to prevent any forward movement toward the treat.



Because Scruffy is relaxed into the down position, Norma Jeanne releases his collar



She rewards him for holding his position



She now rises slightly from the crouched position and Scruffy holds his stay

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Norma Jeanne rewards Scruffy for holding his position



She stands a bit taller



Norma Jeanne is now standing while Scruffy remains in a down position



She rewards him again...



then releases him from the stay

7. When your dog is relaxed in the down position with you standing in front of it, move one foot back and forth and reward your dog for not getting up.
8. When this is successful, take one step away from your dog and immediately return as though you were a rubber band, reward and release your dog.
9. When this is successful you can take one step back and hold your position for the count of three.
10. When your dog is successful you can expand one of the two criteria for any "stay:"
  - a. Length of time
  - b. Distance from your dog



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Cordelia gives her stay cue and signal, takes one step back from Scruffy then immediately returns to him



Now she takes one step back and holds her position for the count of three before returning

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This time she takes two steps back and holds her position

### Note

- Follow the list of rules noted for the sit stay exercise (see page 49 of the Basic Training Manual).
- When expanding time or distance, only expand one criterion per exercise. Make sure time or distance is expanded in small increments such as one step each time or a few seconds longer to set your dog up for success. Only take the next step when your dog is successful with the last – let your dog set the pace.
- Always reward your dog then release it at the end of each repetition.

### References

Dr. Ian Dunbar, Basic Training Video Series, TVS Television, 1992  
International Animal Studies Obedience Training Course 1994