

Boundary Training

Boundary training is easy to teach and highly effective but it is time consuming and doesn't come without risk. Even the best-trained dog can be distracted and cross the boundary if the temptation is too great. You also run the risk of other people, dogs or animals entering your dog's territory and causing problems for your dog.

For boundary training to be successful you need to control your dog and the environment at all times to make it impossible for your dog to cross the invisible boundary unless or until the cue is given to do so. Crossing the boundary must be allowed on leash, on cue, and in one location only.

Begin by walking four feet within the invisible boundary with your dog on-leash numerous times per day without allowing your dog to cross the boundary. Markers such as flags can be used temporarily or indefinitely to help both you and your dog determine where this invisible line is.

When your dog approaches the line, a verbal cue is used to let your dog know when it approaches forbidden territory. Your cue may be something like "back," "off" or "here." Choose a cue that is used for this instruction only and one not commonly used in regular dialogue. Something in another language would work as well.

When your dog is avoiding the invisible boundary on its own you can switch to a longer leash allowing your dog more movement and the opportunity to make choices, while ensuring that you can intervene before your dog crosses the line if necessary.

When your dog is choosing not to cross the invisible line you can add a lifeline secured firmly in the center of the yard. This allows your dog to get no closer than four feet from the invisible line in any direction at any time. You will continue to supervise and give the verbal cue if your dog gets too close to the invisible line.

When your dog is not attempting to cross the invisible line, you'll need to add a variety of real life distractions, such as other dogs, people calling your dog, cats, squirrels, food, etc. to proof your dog to as many distractions as possible that may tempt it to cross the line.

If your dog is still reliable you can begin to gradually remove yourself from the picture. Begin by standing in the center of the yard and verbally communicating with your dog, always correcting any attempts to approach the line. You can then stand next to the door of your house and do the same thing.

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If the leash remains loose, meaning that your dog is not attempting to approach the invisible boundary, your next step is to step inside the door and gradually remove yourself from sight for a few seconds at a time. As you can see, removing yourself from the picture must be done gradually and carefully. It's important to have your dog in sight at all times when it's tied to the line in case it gets tangled and until your training program is complete.

Once again add a variety of distractions. When your dog is consistently avoiding the invisible boundary, remove the rope and begin supervising again, gradually removing yourself from the picture.

If you move too quickly, you'll confuse your dog. If you follow the process precisely and thoroughly, working your dog four to six times a day you can boundary-train your dog in six weeks, but every dog is different and some are more easily distracted than others. The less time you have to work with your dog the longer it will take. Remember that every time your dog crosses the line, you're back to square one because your dog knows it has a choice. For boundary training to be successful there must be no choice.

By working my dogs five to ten minutes, four to six times a day, I had my dogs successfully boundary trained in three months but these were mature, trained dogs. I lived on a busy corner lot with people walking their dogs past numerous times per day. The final test came one day when my dogs were in the yard and a squirrel ran through. My German Shorthaired Pointer, Kimo was bred from hunting stock. She was hot on the tail of that squirrel and as she came to the invisible line she came to a sliding halt. Our training was successful.

I want to warn you that boundary training does not come without risk. Although I have successfully boundary trained a number of dogs, because I am no longer willing to take the risk with my own dogs I make sure they are behind a secured fence at all times when I'm not there to supervise.



Tikka – Complements of Janet Greenwood