

The Relaxed Down

For self control, this exercise is the first thing I teach dogs at the shelter and in class.

Relaxed Down on leash:

Dog can maintain quiet relaxed down position next to you while you sit or stand while you are working or talking with others. The relaxed position has the dog lying over on one hip, not in a crouched down and with no tension on the leash. Your dog will learn it can relax and be attentive without needing to interact.

1. Clip the leash to your dog's buckle collar and place foot on leash so that your dog's head is pulled slightly downward. You are putting just enough pressure on your dog's neck so that lying down will be the most comfortable position. BE PATIENT. Give your dog as much as 3 minutes to figure out how to be comfortable. You are not forcing the dog down. You are creating a situation that the dog will solve by lying down. Do not give your dog any command. Be very calm & matter of fact. The moment the dog lies down and relaxes his muscles, click and treat (or say yes) and step off the leash.

PROBLEM SOLVING: dog is sitting or standing with neck bent to floor but won't lay down even after waiting 3 minutes, then reposition your foot so that the leash is just a little shorter. Don't jerk or comment, just inexorably and quietly reposition. As soon as the dog goes down, click and treat.

2. When your dog is able to lay quietly next to you with no pressure on leash, begin to ask dog to "relax" as you are putting your foot on the leash. Use the dog's name first to get his attention, when you have eye contact step on the leash and say "relax". Click & treat when he is down and settled quietly

3. When you have done step #1&2 enough times so that the dog immediately lies down when you say "relax" as you begin to place your foot on the leash, then you are ready to lengthen the time your dog stays down. Now wait for 5 seconds after your dog is down before the click and treat. Remember that your dog can get up after the click. Each time you will juggle the times that the dog remains down before the click and treat. (5sec, ten sec, 20sec, 7sec..ect) You are working up to 10-15 minutes or until your dog goes to sleep.

4. Now get your dog's attention by saying his name, say "relax" smile, maintain eye contact and give the dog a few seconds to process the request. If he doesn't go down simply put your foot on the leash and click and treat when he is down, calm and settled. Don't say relax again. It's the dog's job to listen. Click and treat. From now on, each time you want the relaxed down, say "relax", wait briefly to see if he acts before putting your foot on the leash. Click and treat when down, relaxed, calm. Do not lose your patience. If you remain matter of fact you will see the moment the dog thinks, "Oh, I know how to do this". Whenever your dog avoids responding to a distraction during the relaxed down, click and treat. Let your dog know that you will reward good choices.

5. Practice relaxed downs in constantly more distracting situations. Don't ask your dog to handle a more distracting situation until your dog can be quiet and watchful without any pressure on the leash. Go into town and do your on leash relaxed down outside a store. Ask people not to pat the dog, but to talk with you. When the dog gets up, simply step on leash and click and treat when he returns to the relaxed down. Don't let the good will of friends and strangers distract your dog. Until the dog can stay in the relaxed down, no one should be patting or talking to the dog.

6. Let family, friends and strangers pat your dog briefly while in the relaxed down. Don't let anyone call your dog's name while he is in the relaxed down. Reinforce with click and treat for staying in position. Don't let any one - particularly children - distract the dog from the quiet, calm watchfulness of the relaxed down.

PHILOSOPHY: The relaxed down teaches self-control and calmness. The dog learns that he can quietly, calmly be with you, he can watch and wait. He doesn't always have to act. It teaches your dog that he can comfortably and safely wait while exciting things go on around him. Without self-control - calm, watchfulness- a dog can't learn and can't exercise judgment. Neither can we.

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