

Teaching Stay

The aim of teaching your dog to 'stay' is so they remain in a specific position until you return to them. This can be a challenging thing for dogs to learn because we're asking them to remain at a distance from us for an extended period of time, regardless of whatever distractions might be happening! That's tricky to do, especially when we spend so much time with our dogs and teach them to come to us and pay us attention when we ask.

However dogs can learn to stay in one place, especially if training is always fun and rewarding. We do this by using reward-based training and progressing only very gradually, so our dogs can be confident at every stage.

Teaching your dog to stay

- ❖ Set your dog up for success by initially training in a quiet place like your home or garden. Ask your dog to sit (or lie down if this is easier or more comfortable for them), then reward them with a treat immediately. Encourage them to stand back up, and then repeat. This stage rewards your dog for the position you will eventually want them to remain in when you start moving away from them.
- ❖ Ask your dog to sit then wait one second before rewarding them with a treat. Then encourage them to move about and have a brief break, before repeating. Gradually build up the time between asking them to sit and rewarding them, until your dog can stay sitting still for five seconds. At this stage you will still be standing right next to them!
- ❖ Now you can add the cue word 'stay'. Ask your dog to sit, then say 'stay' and wait five seconds before rewarding them with a treat. Then encourage them to move away and have a short break. Only say 'stay' once. Don't repeat yourself as you want your dog to be able to listen after just one ask!
- ❖ Gradually continue to build up the time that your dog stays sitting still. When your dog can sit still for 10 seconds, start to make the length of time you ask them to stay still for completely unpredictable. For example, ask for three seconds before rewarding them then letting them move, then four seconds before rewarding, then two, then five, then eight... and so on! This means your dog won't be able to predict how long they need to stay still for, so they shouldn't start to move until you've made it clear by returning to them and rewarding them.



The owner stays next to their dog, asks them to sit, then gives them a treat after they have stayed still for just 1 second. They will slowly build up to their dog sitting for 5 seconds before giving the treat.



- ❖ If your dog gets up before you've rewarded them this could mean that the length of time you're asking them to stay still is too long at this point, or you have been training for too long and they're tired or getting bored. Go back to some shorter stays, then finish the session or do something simple your dog knows well and can get right! Stay positive - showing your dog that you are unhappy may confuse them and make them worry.
- ❖ Ask your dog to sit and 'stay'. Lean slightly away to the side, to get them used to you moving your body away from them. Go back to your starting position and reward them. Encourage them to stand up and move around for a short break, and then repeat.

🐾 Next ask your dog to sit and 'stay', and this time move one step to the side. Then return to your dog and reward them if they have remained sitting down.

🐾 Always return to your dog before you reward them. We want them to feel that the position they are staying in is really rewarding, as it always results in you returning and giving them a treat, so they won't want to move at all! If you give the reward to your dog as you're going back to them and they get up, you're actually teaching them that getting up gets them the reward, so they'll start to get up as soon as you start to return to them. Be careful to reward exactly what you want, which is your dog in the position in which you left them.



The owner has gradually built up to being able to take a step away from their dog, waiting for a short while, then returning and rewarding their dog.



🐾 Gradually build up how far and in what direction you move. As with building up the duration, we want to be unpredictable. So for example, you might practise moving one step to the side, then two, then one step backwards or on the diagonal, then four steps ahead. This variety teaches your dog that whatever direction you move away from them, they will still only get their treat reward for staying exactly in the position they were in when you said 'stay'.

🐾 You should now understand the principles of teaching your dog to stay and they should be good at doing this within your home, so it's time to take it on the road! When you start training, your dog may think 'stay' only means 'stay' inside the house or the garden, or wherever you've been practising. You'll need to go back to the beginning whenever you start to train them in new places. But don't worry, your dog will get quicker each time and will soon start to grasp the concept wherever you may be.

🐾 Build distractions in gradually by carefully choosing the locations you practise in and how busy they are. It becomes much harder for your dog to stay still the more activity that is happening around them. Start in the garden, then an empty park, then somewhere where people and dogs are far away, then closer, and so on. You can use extra special treats in locations that are particularly challenging for them!

🐾 You can also make distractions yourself. For example, can your dog stay while you roll a ball slowly (then gradually get faster), skip away, chat to someone else or go out of sight? The possibilities are only limited by your imagination and really help cement the concept of 'stay' to your dog. Remember there is no need to rush! Building up the difficulty slowly and setting your dog up for success should mean your dog's behaviour is more reliable.

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your

Dogs Trust dog please email: postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk



Your nearest Dogs Trust Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via: www.dogstrustdogschoo.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.