

# Teaching Your Dog To Settle

As part of your family, it's important for dogs to learn to relax, lie down, and have time on their own. It's especially important for them to do this when you're busy at home, with guests, making dinner, cleaning the house, or outside with friends at the pub or café! It's hard for your dog to learn to be settled when there are distractions, lots of activity, or opportunities for attention, so it's best to begin practising somewhere quiet.

## Teaching your dog to settle down

Start training at home and at times when your dog is more likely to be already relaxing. You'll know your dog is truly settled when they lie down, not asking for attention, and not easily distracted by what's going on around them. To begin with you may just need to reward your dog for any behaviour that is not staring at you, pulling on the lead, or barking.

- ❗ Sit quietly on a chair with your dog on the lead and a blanket on the floor. Drop tiny bite size treats to your dog as a reward for settling down on the blanket. Don't say anything to your dog whilst doing this.
- ❗ Gradually reward more relaxed behaviours. This will vary between dogs. Some will automatically start lying down and you can quickly progress to rewarding your dog only for this behaviour, before moving on to reward specific signs of relaxing like sighing, weight shifting and head resting. Other dogs will take longer and will struggle to stop pulling on the lead or staring at you. If this is the case with your dog, you'll need to take things more slowly by rewarding behaviours such as standing quietly, disengaging from people or sniffing their blanket.
- ❗ When your dog is relaxed, start increasing the time they must be settled before you reward them. Gradually build up by a couple of seconds a time, over multiple training sessions.
- ❗ When your dog is starting to get the hang of it and is shifting their weight so they're comfortable and relaxing, you can start practising with them off lead. You need your dog to learn that they can settle down whether they are on or off-lead, practising very useful skills for a lot of different situations!
- ❗ Slowly start building up distractions by practising the 'settle' in increasingly busy areas. Or ask a helper to create a distraction by walking past, before progressing to more exciting activities like sweeping or skipping. If your dog becomes unsettled or gets up, ignore them and wait until they settle again before rewarding them. If they won't relax and settle, increase the distance from the distraction or make the distraction less interesting.
- ❗ Once your dog has learnt the basic objective of being settled, try training in different locations with more distractions.



The owner drops a small treat into their dog's bed every so often while working at the computer, so the dog knows this is a good place to rest and is rewarded for settling here.

## Key points

- ✿ Initially reward any relaxed behaviour your dog shows, such as sitting quietly and not pestering you. Build up to reward lying down and completely relaxing.
- ✿ Withdraw your attention if your dog becomes over-excited or unsettled. Don't touch, talk to, or make eye contact with your dog, just turn your back and ignore them.
- ✿ If you feel more confident then it's fine to keep your dog on lead whilst training. Make sure you ask people not to interact with them so they can completely relax!
- ✿ Try to resist telling your dog what to do during training, the aim is for them to learn for themselves to be calm and to relax. This is a form of learning that requires your dog to learn to settle without needing to be asked.
- ✿ Always make sure your dog is having a good time when settling, whether enjoying their toys, chews, or simply dozing and snoozing!

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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.