



Some Good Advice for Owners of Adult and Adolescent Dogs

Setting Boundaries - Building Confidence - Opening the Lines of Communication

Build your dog's self-confidence and ability to cope with the world without needing you by his side at all times. This social animal needs to feel confident in your ability to provide and protect. He will become more relaxed and confident through his relationship and bonding with you and other people. When the dog is confident in your abilities and trusts your intentions, he will become more responsive to you and your commands – seeking your attention through behaviours that please you, and less likely to be distracted by other influences.

The tie-up or restraint exercise stops the dog from being able to be at your feet the whole time you are at home. If commenced in puppy-hood, it will eventually produce a dog that is confident to be tied-up and left alone, even in an unfamiliar scenario. In an over-dependent adult dog, it will help to relieve anxiety and develop independence, when progressed from a level that the dog can cope with and very gradually increased to more difficult levels.



Start at the easiest possible level: tie the dog on a short lead (approx 40 - 60 cm) to the leg of the chair you are sitting in. Experience will show the dog that any fighting or struggling against the lead (or you, at the end of the lead), is futile.

When the dog has become accepting of this situation of restraint, you can move onto the next level. If your dog is strong enough to pull the chair over without you sitting in it, you will now need to tie the lead to the leg of a table or something else strong enough to hold the dog. Sit just out of reach of the dog – when the dog is accepting and calm in this scenario, step up to moving around the room, then leaving the room, etc, etc.

Always build on success – our aim is to avoid the dog ever becoming panicked – we want to build confidence. Tie up exercises can last anywhere from two minutes to several hours – just remember to take toileting requirements into consideration.

Vary the time of day and location of the exercise.

Freedom from the restraint exercise must only be granted when the dog is behaving perfectly and has been for at least the last ten seconds!

Aim to practice at least once a day.

The Importance of Play

It is unreasonable to expect a dog to remain calm and controlled at all times. It would be impossible! Your dog needs an outlet and play is the most effective means of developing the human – dog bond. Retrieve and tug-o-war and variations of these games are the most common. Your dog must accept the two rules involved:



1. He must not grab or lunge for the toy in hand. He must exercise impulse control and wait for you to say the cue, YES.
2. He must release the toy immediately on your command, LEAVE.

Initially you may need to build your dog's retrieve or tug drive (or not!) Once the dog is keen, then dangle the toy tantalisingly above or around the dog. If he lunges for it, say AH-AH and withdraw the toy from his reach. Repeat a couple of times. When the dog is not lunging for the toy, say YES and then throw it or offer it for tug.

When you want the dog to release the toy, say LEAVE and then place a piece of food treat to his nose. Hopefully, he will release the toy in order to eat the food treat. You can further reward him by now saying YES and throwing or offering the toy again. If he doesn't release the toy for the food, take his collar at the top of his neck and calmly lift him just off his front feet. He may attempt to continue to tug, throwing his head around and thrashing about. Simply stand still with his front feet just off the ground and wait him out. Eventually he will be bored with this non-game and release the toy. At which point you'll praise him and say YES and throw or offer the toy again.



Tug-o-war will not make a dog aggressive. Dogs will make growling noises during play and this does not indicate that the dog is aggressive.

Returning the retrieve toy to you can be assisted by sitting in the doorway of a smallish room and throwing the toy into the room. Allow the dog to retrieve the toy and then encourage him towards you. He has nowhere else to go!

Some dogs simply do not want to part with the "trophy" and want to be chased. Do not chase. Have two or more identical toys and once the dog has retrieved one but not returned it, you can then show great interest in the next toy, even throw it. The dog will drop the original toy to retrieve the new, more valuable toy.

Attaching a long-line to the dog's collar can also be of assistance in this respect.

If your dog is not interested in chasing the toy or loses interest once the toy stops moving, you can tie a long cord or fishing line to the toy and “dance” it around like a live thing.

An old towel can entice a reserved dog into a game of tug. Get down on the floor and whip it around like a live thing. If the dog grabs it, encourage him to tear it. It will build his tug drive immensely.

Should your dog not be accepting of the rules of play, please seek further advice. But don't simply give up. Play provides opportunities for quality of life enhancement, exercise, stimulation and bonding. A dog that plays regularly is a happy dog that is more likely able to settle when required and less likely to engage in problem behaviour.

Greeting and Re-uniting

Greetings on your return home or on getting up in the morning should be calm. If the dog is displaying over-excitement, ignore him for the first ten to thirty minutes, acknowledging him only once he has calmed down and given up demanding your attention.

He Doesn't Need to be With You to Feel Safe

Dogs will benefit from learning to accept that there will be times when they will be excluded from the pack, by being placed in the laundry, bathroom or backyard, not only when you go out, but also for periods of time when you are at home. As with the tie-up or restraint exercise, always start at a level that is only mildly stressful for the dog. If your dog cannot cope with being excluded in the backyard; you might need to start with tie-up exercises in the back yard with you staying with him, and progress from there.

Aim to practice at least once a day.

It's not a cage! Dogs come to love their crates as their own private sanctuary; they seem to enjoy the feeling of being ensconced. A crate provides a safe haven for a stressed or anxious dog and also keeps the dog safe when travelling. If you feel you would like to have your dog in your bedroom each night, I recommend that you still exclude him on at least one night a week to maintain his independence. If your dog has anxiety related problem behaviours and has been sleeping in your bedroom or on your bed to date, introduce the crate for sleeping next to your bed each night and then gradually move the crate away from your bed, towards the bedroom door and then out into the hallway and down the hallway to the laundry or bathroom. Once he is happy to sleep in the crate anywhere, you can then have him back on your bed most nights.

For extreme cases, introduce periods of time spent in the crate during daylight hours. Introduce pleasant associations to the crate such as special food treats or chews. You might have to stay beside the dog in the crate initially and then progress in a similar manner as the tie-up or restraint exercise.



Variety is the Spice of Life

Avoid establishing routines. Or if you must; make a habit of breaking them on at least a weekly basis. Dogs can become dependent on routines and problems may arise when any deviation from set routines is made; the dog becomes distressed because the routine he depends upon has let him down.

Vary the time of day that the dog is fed, walked, trained, groomed, etc. Vary the route of his walk, the length of his training sessions, the location of his tie-up exercise, where he sleeps, when he is allowed inside and when he is excluded. The more variety incorporated into his life the more he will become “immunised” against developing anxieties.

Hyper-excitement

Hyper-excitement is not healthy for your dog. Of course, your dog is allowed to be excited about activities and events; but over-excitement is actually stressful to the dog.

Common occasions for displays of hyper-excitement include:

- His dinner being prepared.
- Picking up the lead or changing your shoes in readiness for a walk.
- Greetings on your arrival home.
- Greetings of visitors.
- Greetings of people and/or dogs you meet in the street.

To counteract the hyper-excitement you will need to disappoint the dog:

- Prepare his dinner and then leave it sitting on the bench for the next hour. Give it to him only when he is no longer expecting its arrival.
- Pick up the lead and change your shoes and then stay home. Wear the shoes and tie the lead around your waist for the next 30 minutes. Then go for a walk when he is no longer expecting it.
- Ignore the dog when you arrive home. Leave him in the back yard or have him do a tie-up/restraint exercise for the next 20 minutes. Calmly greet him when he has stopped trying to gain your attention.
- Place the dog on a tie-up/restraint exercise when you are expecting visitors and have the visitors completely ignore him – not even eye contact. He can remain restrained by the tie-up for the entire visit. Once his excitement levels have begun receding on arrival of visitors; you can then bring him from the tie-up to sitting beside you in the presence of the visitor, on-lead, in a controlled sit or drop. The visitor could offer him an occasional food treat when he is calm.
- Walk the dog along a busy street. Hopefully, there will be too many people and dogs to greet every one of them. Don't interact with any; just keep walking. Use a happy tone of voice to convey to your dog that you are comfortable and relaxed in this scenario.

Additionally, use relaxation techniques to help your dog feel relaxed and calm in situations that usually bring on hyper-excitement. You may need to increase the distance from the exciting thing! I find ear massages excellent for calming dogs.

Manners!

Movements through “exciting” doorways where the dog is keen to progress are an opportunity to help the dog learn manners or “impulse control”.

Teach your dog that competing with you to rush through a door or gate is not going to be successful for him. He is far more likely to achieve success by working with you.

When approaching a control doorway with your dog, open the door a small crack and abruptly close it again when the dog is pushing to go ahead of you. Say nothing, remain silent.

Repeat the process until the dog will hold back and allow you to go first – it shouldn't take more than five to six repetitions.

Encourage the dog to look up at your face or eyes and only when he is focused on you and not trying to push through the door will you give him the release cue, FREE, and allow him to move through the doorway.

Manners at Dinnertime



When feeding the dog have him hold a sitting position while the meal is placed on the ground. The dog must await the release command, FREE, before eating the food. Select a morsel of food from the bowl and hold it between your eyes and the dog's eyes in order to have the dog hold focus on your face. On the release cue, FREE, drop the morsel back into the bowl and if necessary, encourage the dog to commence eating.

Tidy up your dog's eating habits and **improve food motivation** in readiness for training the dog with food rewards. Meals are left down for ten minutes only. If there is any food left after ten minutes or the food is completely untouched, it should be removed and nothing further offered to the dog until the next regular meal-time.

Discourage the dog from **guarding his food**. We would like to be able to feel confident that if we or our children happened to approach the dog while he was eating, the dog would tolerate the situation, without displaying any form of aggression.

We need to understand the dog's natural instincts and behaviour in regard to food. In canine law, possession is nine tenths of the law. Any member of the pack is entitled to guard food in his/her possession against any other member of the pack, despite the rank of each individual involved. This is why a dog is highly unlikely to growl at you while you are standing up with the food bowl, but the moment you place it on the ground, he/she will consider it in their possession and feel

entitled to guard it from you. Should you reach out to take the food bowl whilst the dog is guarding it, you will risk being bitten. However, once you have possession of the bowl again, the dog will behave in what seems an apologetic manner.



Having ignored the dog's attempts to warn you off, next time you attempt to steal the food, he may feel a need to escalate that warning! Conversely, you maybe able to successfully intimidate the dog into not growling at you when you approach the food, but think ahead: the dog will not feel intimidated by a crawling baby or young child and as you have already taught the dog that humans are indeed a threat to food in his possession, the baby or child is likely to be at risk.

Let's use our understanding of the dog, to alter the idea in his mind as to what our approach to the food signifies. Do not teach the dog that you are a threat to the food, by attempting to take it when he tries to warn you off. Heed the warning and do not approach any closer. This way, your dog can feel comfortable that he does not have to escalate the warning. You now "speak dog".

Place only half of the dog's meal in the bowl, reserving the yummiest bits, steak fat, leftovers, etc. Place the dog's bowl on the ground in the usual manner and move away. Return to the dog with more food in your hand before he has finished the food in the bowl. Stop, the moment you detect any warning such as tensing up or growling. Toss the food into the bowl. Repeat the sequence.

It will depend on the dog's past experiences as to how long it will take you to be able to approach the dog at the food without him feeling concerned at all. We want to achieve the ultimate result of being able to pet the dog and even move his food bowl, without him becoming concerned. (Start by always giving him further yummys after each occasion he has tolerated your petting or touching the bowl).

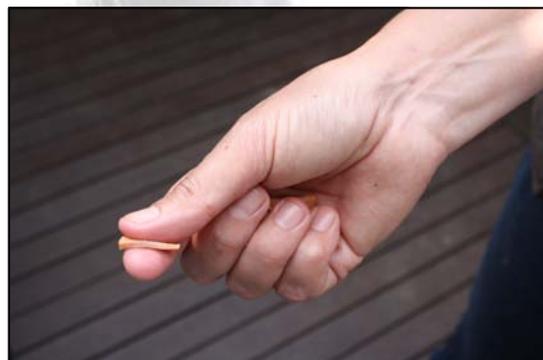
Of course, this type of training needs to be carried out by an adult. Only when the dog is absolutely reliable, would you consider introducing a child to the scenario. And then, tie the dog on lead so that he can reach the food bowl and no further – your child is then provided with a safety gap.

Repeat this exercise with an especially favourite food of the dog's, such as raw meaty bones. Have the butcher cut the bones into many small pieces so that you can start the dog on a few in his bowl and then add more after he has started eating.

Sit Happens!

Commence or formalise the "**sit**" exercise. Remember, you are not only training the dog to sit on command, but also to hold that sitting position until you end the exercise with the release cue, FREE.

Once the dog has sat, say GOOD and *then* give him a treat of food from the fingertips of your right hand. Use your voice, the food, the lead or anything else to get and keep the dog's focus and attention on your face. Further pay him for holding that sitting position on a relaxed lead *and* paying attention to you.



Use the lead to block the dog from being able to leave the sitting position.

The praise, GOOD, is always given *before* the delivery of the food treat, to build an association between the two. The term, "ah-ah", indicates to the dog that his current action will not be rewarded or successful in any way. Example: if the dog lifts his front feet off the ground in order to get to the incoming food treat, "ah-ah" combined with you quickly withdrawing the food, will result in the dog holding the sitting position in order to draw the food reward back in.

Once the release cue has been given, gently or playfully move the dog out of the sitting position.

Motivation

Aim to achieve at least one training session each day. However, each training session should be no more than **three minutes**. You want to finish the session with the dog begging to do more, so that the next time, the dog will be keen and enthusiastic.

Socialisation and Experience

It is a myth that dogs need to socialise heavily with other dogs by being off-lead and playing hard. Puppies learn most of what they need to learn about being a dog whilst with their mother and litter up to eight weeks of age. A play session with another dog once a week is more than sufficient. Your dog needs to learn how to maintain good behaviour in the presence of other dogs. He does not need to greet every other dog he meets in the street.

On occasions you will want your dog to meet other dogs belonging to friends and acquaintances you meet on walks in your neighbourhood. The other dog must always be on lead and under control when your dog meets them, particularly on the first occasion. Ensure there is no tension in either lead and allow the dogs to perform the meeting and greeting ritual of head to tail manoeuvre. Then move along! This social interaction can become uncomfortable and awkward if the dogs are left dangling in each other's close proximity – it's not natural! It's probably the equivalent of our "uncomfortable silence". Alternatively, if you wish to hold a conversation with the owner of the other dog, bring your dog into the control position on your left and ask the other owner to keep their dog back.

Fear

Your dog should always feel able to escape from anything frightening – if their flight path is blocked, they may turn to aggression or intimidation. This is not to say that you run a mile away with your dog; simply allow him to take a backward step or two. Your reaction to his fear should be very off-hand – do not try to console. The dog may interpret your consoling voice as you also being nervous.

Keep the lead loose so that the dog does not feel like it is cornered without an escape path.

On the majority of occasions your dog should simply walk by other dogs in the street. Saying "hello / good morning" in a cheerful voice will assist young dogs or nervous dogs to understand that you are comfortable in the approach and presence of another social animal, without the need to interact further. It is important that you do not allow your dog to drag you over to meet other dogs, as this will become the mode of behaviour.

If you want your dog to meet another dog, start with the control exercise (sitting calmly on your left with a relaxed lead) at a sufficient distance for your dog to be able to remain calm and under your control. Only when your dog is calmly holding the sitting position on a relaxed lead and focusing on your face, would you give the release command.

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