

Training Your Dog to Stay

The "stay" command is essential to your dog's training.

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The next command your pup should learn is the stay. This can be the most difficult thing for a puppy to do. Young pups are constantly in motion. Remaining still in the same spot is not at the top of a pup's list of favorite things. If you can train your pup to remain still for even 30 seconds of a sit/stay or down/stay, it will be quite an accomplishment. If you can work it up to a minute, your pup is a genius and you're a master trainer!

The stay command will need to be done through a gradual increase of your criteria, using successive approximation. This type of training is used whenever gradually increasing the criteria for any given exercise. For example, when you began teaching your pup to heel by taking one step and building on that, you used successive approximation. As he accomplished a couple of steps, you went on to more steps in between each stop and sit. Before long, you were walking ten steps and doing turns. You successively increased the criteria for each reward the treat.

Begin teaching this exercise by first playing the Round Robin game. When your pup arrives and sits, place the palm of your hand in front of his nose, (not touching him) and say Pup, stay. Hold the treat near his nose but don't give it to him for three to five seconds. Praise him as he remains in place (click). Give him his treat, and then the next person should call him to come. Each time you have the puppy come and sit, increase the amount of time that he has to maintain a stay before receiving his reward.

Since you'll have a lot to do within a short time frame, looking at your watch is not something you can coordinate. You can more easily count the seconds by using, Good boys. One second equals one Good boy. The first time you do a stay, you'll say Good boy one to two times. The next time your pup gets two to three Good boys. And so on, until puppy can remain in place for at least 30 seconds.

By the time you reach five to six words of praise, puppy may start popping up and trying to go to the next person, who might be more willing to offer a treat for a simple sit. You can prevent this by stepping on his leash when he arrives and sits in front of you. Should he get up, you can easily bring him back into position by luring him with the treat and repeating your stay command. After replacing him in approximately the same location, again tell him to stay, but this time shorten the amount of time to two or three Good boys. Sometimes you need to regress in order to progress. When working with a puppy, everything needs to remain as positive as possible. Going back to a comfortable zone (in this case, less time in the stay) increases the pup's desire to perform.