



WORKING DOG PROGRAM

DOG TRAINING FOR TODAY'S URBAN LIFESTYLE

SUZANNE WIEBE

The 3 D's of Success - Distance, Duration, Distraction

This lesson is the most important you will ever learn. If you can remember that a calm dog is an obedient dog. A happy dog wants to work. And, a fearful dog resorts to instinctual behaviour, then you have everything you need to create a highly obedient dog.

Distance

There are 2 parts to the distance exercise.

1. This is the distance you can move from your dog and it will remain calm. This has nothing to do with how far you can move and the dog will obey you. If the dog is relaxed, then it will stay.
2. How close you can approach something that excites a dog, and still have the dog remain calm. This is called 'threshold.' Each dog has a threshold and if you want an obedient dog you need to learn how to identify it.
3. Advanced Distance: Can you go out of site and your dog remains calm enough to keep obeying you. Remember, your dog is a working breed. It is bred to stay with you. It is bred to become anxious when you are 'out of site' and might be in danger.

Duration

1. How long will your dog remain in the stay position?
2. How long will your dog 'look' at you?
3. How long will the dog heel?
4. How long can your dog remain relaxed and happy in a high stress situation?
5. Does your dog trust you to 'take care of the situation?'

Distraction

1. What excites your dog?
2. What makes your dog afraid?
3. What makes your dog ignore you?
4. What makes your dog disobey you?

Get Started - Duration

Work on duration first

1. Start all exercises with your face less than 2' from the dog's face.
2. Never let the dog 'choose' to break the task (sit, down, heel). Count to measure your dog's duration, and then 'step back 2 seconds'. Or 'step back' 2 steps. Don't challenge the dog's threshold until your present success is rock solid for a few days of practice.
3. Keep the initial duration only a few seconds.
4. Try the task 1-3 times, and then break for a short play time.
5. Never go over threshold
6. Every 10 times the dog successfully completes the exercise slow the reward down 2 - 5 seconds. If the dog fails the exercise 'step back 2.'
7. Add the cue after the dog successfully does the task when you only use targeting, luring, hand signals, and verbal praise.

Next is Distraction

1. Stay in a comfortable area where you control all distractions. Use a mild distraction with the 'look' and 'leave it' command.
2. Do not punish if your dog breaks. Instead, reduce the distraction and praise good behavior.
3. If the dog won't work today, then call it quits and try again tomorrow.
4. Never use a distraction that frightens the dog
5. Do not do distance and distraction at the same time. Increase the distraction until the dog remains calm for 10 - 15 seconds with a mild distraction. Then add duration until the dog is good for 30 seconds to one minute. Then add more distraction.
6. Wait till your dog is 'rock solid' for 3 minutes, with a high distraction before taking the dog out of the 'distraction free environment.

What is a distraction? You need to be creative when finding distractions. Most people rush to the biggest distractions, making it harder for the dog to relax. Or, they undermine their success by gravitating to the same distractions.

Light, sounds, smells, different items, you moving, and food can be distractions. Sing, wave your arms, wear a big baggy coat, or move into different rooms of the house. Train near the front door. Train in the basement. Keep working in one room, or with one distraction, until your dog is rock solid.

There is an element of this task that you need to learn, and control. You need to learn what stresses your dog. What environments make it difficult to do the task? What distractions are difficult for your dog to endure? It will be your responsibility to protect and manage your dog until it is old enough to handle the distractions without panic. This is often two years old for most breeds.

Adding Distance

1. Distance should be extended slowly. Only back up one step at a time.
2. Measure your success by the length of time your dog can go without showing any stress.
3. Will your dog obey your cue at a distance

It is tempting to force the dog to endure more and more distance. Or to just 'pop' out of site for a few seconds. But remember that 'rock solid' stays can only be held by a calm dog who trusts you. If you try to 'trick' the dog to see if it will give you more distance, you are breaking trust. When this happens the dog becomes stressed.

I've seen many people 'push the limits' and their dog takes it, but the dog is stressed. The stress builds little by little. Then after 3 - 5 weeks, it seems like the dog 'suddenly' won't stay. You don't know what happened because you ignored the stress.

Proofing

Before forcing more distance, or distractions make sure your dog really understands what you want. Many times they repeat a behavior that makes you happy, but they don't understand the hand signals or the verbal cues.

Before taking your dog to the next stage make sure that it is rock solid at this stage. I wouldn't move a dog until I could do the task 3 - 5 times a day, for 3 days. I also watch my dog. Is it happy? Does it respond quickly? Does it look at me, not the reinforce?

Make sure that your dog will obey the cue at a distance before moving to the next level, or moving outside, or around dogs and people.

If your dog breaks (moves) before you give the release command then shorten your duration. Don't make excuses. Don't ignore it when the dog fails to perform the task. Step back, be patient, and remember that time is the best gift you can give your dog.

Mistakes Owners Make

1. Trying to move too fast. Many people want to be 10' from their dog for 5 minutes in the first week of teaching the stay. This creates anxiety in the dog. The stay exercise needs to teach the dog it is safe, even when you are away. If you don't teach your dog to relax then you won't have a solid stay.
2. Trying to teach Distance, Duration, Distraction at the same time.
3. Not practicing for short 30 - 2 minute bursts, through the say.
4. Adding too much Distance, Duration, or Distraction at a time.
5. Not paying attention to the dog's thresholds and triggers.
6. Forgetting the verbal, physical (petting), and play reinforcers to break up the training period.
7. Punishing the dog too fast, too far. Forgetting to proof the dog's performance.
8. Forcing the dog to approach, or go over threshold, too fast. Remember, it is about teaching your dog to remain calm and happy. If the dog isn't having fun then it won't work.
9. Never use the cue until your dog has been rock solid in with different distractions, and durations.
10. If the dog fails, even some times, go back to the last stage the dog was rock solid.
11. Remember that your body language gives cues. If your dog isn't improving after a week have someone watch your body language. Your shoulders, hips, a let, your hand - any of these can send a signal to your dog. Your dog will follow your body language before it will follow verbal cues.

Training is a process - Not an event