

## Any Dog Can Live Calmly in a House: Even Yours!

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### Wouldn't It Be Nice If...

*My dog could come in the house without naughtily chewing on things? My family could go out in the yard without being jumped on by our dog? My dog would stay calm when guests came over? My dog would just lay by my feet so we could enjoy some quality time together after a hard day?*

These are all very reasonable goals! The good news is there are lots of simple exercises you can do right now to begin to incorporate your dog into your life without major disruption. Little by little, you can build a happy ending and discover why dogs have rightfully earned the title, “man’s best friend”!



### Let's Get Started!

#### **Settle Down + Go to Your Mat**

The goal of this exercise is for your dog to learn to lie down quietly whenever you sit in a chair or are ignoring him.

1. Gather everything you will need. This includes a leash and comfortable collar for your dog, and a generous amount of pea-sized treats that your dog particularly likes. It's important to mix in some high-value treats if you are going to use your dog's regular kibble, and use his breakfast or dinner for training so he's particularly hungry! You want your dog to be extra motivated when you first start any training, so the treats need to be really good. Think of it like this, do you have a minimum amount that you would do your job for? So does your dog. You can use a towel or mat for your dog to lie on if you would like to teach a “go to your mat” game as explained at the end of this handout.
2. You will also need something for YOU to do – a book to read, TV to watch, etc. Be sure to have the treats in your bait bag or an open container out of your dog's reach– therefore out of sight – so that your dog does not become aroused simply because you have treats. The idea is for your dog to be calm.
3. Bring your dog into the room where you are going to work. Using the leash and collar, go directly to your chair or couch. Sit down with the leash held close (you may hold the leash in your hand, under your foot or even sit on the leash). Your dog should have just enough length of the leash to be able to stand up or lie down with little room for exploring. Drop a couple of treats on the mat for your dog to find when you first begin. Be sure to reward in the absence of behaviors you don't like; for instance, if your dog sometimes barks at you for attention, or chews on the leash and he is doing neither of those things, reward that! Even if it appears that you are rewarding “nothing” that's okay- it means your dog is not doing the things you don't like!
4. As you quietly drop treats for the absence of the unwanted behaviors, it is important to ignore your dog. The rate of reinforcement should be about every 3-10 seconds depending on your dog's attention span. The shorter the attention span, the faster the treats should happen when you first start- you can slow them down later. During this process, be sure you are not talking to your dog, touching or making eye contact with your dog. All of these can be arousing and exciting to dogs and the goal is to get your dog to relax. If your dog barks or whines, pretend you do not hear (or care!). If he nuzzles you, ignore him. If he jumps on you, gently lean forward or stand up slowly so he drops off without you having to touch him with your hands, look at him, or talk to him. Refuse to acknowledge any attempts to get your attention.
5. While pretending not to pay attention to your dog, carefully watch for any calming behaviors or any calmness, such as sitting near you. If your dog becomes bored enough to lie down- you are there – give him a “jackpot” (about 4-6 small treats)! Whether or not he is able to lay down, be sure to reinforce all calmness by placing a couple treats between his paws so that he eats them off of the floor. Do this a number of times, then sit up and go back to ignoring him. Is he still sitting or lying there? Give a few more treats at unpredictable intervals. Be

sure this is a quiet game – you want your dog to rest and be calm, not get excited by adding “Good Dog,” making eye contact, or by petting him. The idea is to get your dog to stay put while being quiet.

6. After about 3-5 minutes of successful calm behavior without any excitable behavior, gather your stuff and move yourself and your dog to another location in the same room. Sit down without talking to your dog and wait again for him to settle down in his new place. Reinforce with treats when he does. Gradually increase the time between treats.
7. If you or your dog get tired of this, tell your dog "All Done" in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, and turn him loose.
8. What's great about this exercise is that all dogs can do it! It is simply a matter of setting yourself up for success and waiting for your dog to offer any calm behavior.
9. If your dog likes to chew on the leash, try some Bitter Apple or “Phooey” spray to soak the leash before you start. You can also try putting a piece of PVC pipe on the leash or attaching a chain leash to his collar (dogs don't like the feel of the chain in their mouth and often won't bite it).
10. Once you are successful with this exercise using a mat, you can start to practice without the mat so your dog learns that you ignoring the dog means relax and lie down, where ever you might be. You can still use your mat when you would like your dog to have something comfortable to lie on, but practice without it as well so it is not the only picture your dog has when settling down.
11. After your dog is good at doing this behavior with you sitting down, practice it while standing with your dog on leash. This will teach him that being ignored is a good thing, even when you are standing. All he has to do is lay down and good things will happen. Eventually, this will become such a habit that he won't even think about the treats, it will become something he does, just in case the treats might appear from the sky!

### ***Reinforce What You Like; Ignore/Prevent What You Don't Want***

This simple learning principle can be applied to any situation. All animals, including people and dogs, are going to repeat behaviors that lead to things they want, and stop doing behaviors that get ignored or aren't reinforced. Have you ever had a friend or child tell the same joke over and over again just because someone laughed? That's reinforcement! If no one laughed, the joke would die a natural death.

Similarly, dogs remember the things that worked for them. If nuzzling you gets you to pet him, a dog will continue to nuzzle to the point it becomes an annoyance. Same with jumping, running through the house, getting on the furniture, barking, whining, stealing shoes, etc. All of these behaviors remain in your dog's repertoire of "What to do when I'm in the house" because they have been reinforced, intentionally or not. Attention from you, even in the form of reprimands, is a powerful reinforcer for dogs, and many dogs will escalate annoying behaviors to get you to notice them. Does this sound familiar to parents of toddlers?

Ignoring what you don't want to encourage is one part, but that won't get you too far if you are not also actively reinforcing what you'd like the dog to do instead. We are all guilty of ignoring dogs when they are peaceful and quiet. Why mess up a good thing, right? Actually, this is a terrific time to go pet your dog or bring him a treat or offer him a walk. Let him discover that being calm brings good things.



Of course, there will be annoying things your dog will find fun and reinforcing with or without your involvement (getting in the trash, for example). That's where good management comes in.

### ***Go to your mat***

“Go to Your Mat” on cue can be added to this exercise if you would like your dog to do a settle in places away from you, such as when you are fixing a meal or when you are eating. To accomplish this behavior, practice the Settle Down using a towel or mat. As your dog starts to associate the “Settle Down” with the mat, he should start offering to go to his mat whenever it is placed on the floor. This is a great behavior to reward- lots- as long as he is on the mat. The rewards should stop if he gets off the mat.



Once your dog is reliable about offering this behavior, you may add the verbal cue of "Go to Your Mat" when you are sure your dog will do the behavior the first time you ask. You will now be able to use the mat in different areas, as well as when you travel or want your dog to be able to relax quickly.

### ***The Joys of "Food Carrier" Toys***

When does your dog ever lie still? "Ha, Never!" you might think, and it's probably true for large chunks of the day. What about when he's chewing on something? Don't almost all dogs lie down to chew?

The common problem is finding something that will hold your dog's attention long enough to settle him down. Lots of dog toys are destroyed in minutes or quickly lose their attraction. In other cases, dogs have so many toys scattered around that none of them are particularly interesting anymore.

"Food Carrier" Toys can be an almost magical solution! They are long-lasting and, by their very nature, are different each time because you refill them with different food temptations. The idea is to stuff these toys so well that your dog will have to work on them for a good hour or longer at a time.

A dog that is laying on the floor working on his "food puzzle" is not running through the house, jumping on people, barking, getting on the furniture or stealing your shoes! By association, your dog begins to learn that being in the house is the time to relax and work on some puzzles.

After a good chew session, most dogs are truly tired - mentally and physically - and are more likely to remain calm for even a little while longer. Food carrier toys are a great way to buy you and your family some peace and quiet AND begin to teach your dog to relax.

The best toy is a rubber hollow Kong™. It's guaranteed indestructible and can easily be cleaned and used over and over again. Look up <http://www.kongcompany.com> for clever ideas on how to stuff the Kong to keep your dog's interest for long periods of time, or view our handout on Kong Stuffing Pointers. Also keep in mind that Kongs are a great vessel for feeding your dog meals - it keeps them mentally engaged, longer.

Remember, if you don't give your dog something engaging to do in the house, he will find his own entertainment. I don't think your dog shares your taste in appropriate home entertainment so take the lead!

### ***A Little Management Goes a Long Way!***

Set yourself up for success. Think of practical ways you can prevent the behaviors you don't want until you can get your training in place. It's OK to let your dog drag a leash or longer "house line" so you can catch him more easily or move him away from restricted areas. Just make sure someone is paying enough attention to keep the dog from getting tangled.

Simply stepping on the leash or dragline can restrict your dog's access so he can't quite jump on you. Calmly picking up the end of the line will prevent all kinds of chase and "keep away" games and will give you an easy way to remove your dog from furniture without confrontation, just be sure to reward with treats when the dog comes to you, gets off the furniture, or follows you on the leash.

If your only means of control is lunging for the collar, you'll find that your dog can easily outmaneuver you, making the dog more excited, or worse, scared of you, and you more frustrated and annoyed! Set it up so you can remain calm and in control.

Tethers and crates are great ways to begin to teach a dog to be calm in a house. Crates, when introduced properly, are terrific "holding areas" (like a playpen or crib for a baby) for up to a few hours at a time. Restricting access via baby gates and XPens can also help. Make sure you give your dog something to do (a puzzle toy, a food carrier toy, a bone, etc.) while they are in the crate or tethered so they have a positive association with the calm, quiet time. A tether can be



as simple as a leash tied to a doorknob or sturdy piece of furniture or an inexpensive and easily made cable of just about 18 inches. Make sure you are within eyesight when a dog is on a tether to prevent choking, tangling and other dangers.

Dogs generally make the best of any situation. If there's nothing to reach or do except for the toys or chews you provide them, they will usually settle down for a nap. Take advantage of this by restricting your dog's access during periods where you'd like him to be still. This is much clearer to your dog than YOU joining in the fun by chasing and yelling!

Remember, if your dog can do something fun, he will. If he can't, he will find something else to do. It's up to you whether your dog develops good habits or bad habits by the experiences you allow him to have. Trying to get a dog to stop once he's started is always more difficult than preventing the behavior in the first place.

### **Additional Resources**

Want to learn more about teaching your dog to settle down and relax? Pick up *Train Your Dog the Lazy Way* by Andrea Arden or *Toolbox for Remodeling Your Problem Dog* by Terry Ryan for lots of practical tips and suggestions. Check out <http://www.clickersolutions.com> for training articles, and come to a training class for hands-on help!

A good trainer, well versed in modern reinforcement methods, can teach you lots more than you can learn in one article. San Diego Humane Society offers "dog-friendly" obedience classes with lots of personal attention. Call 619-299-7012 to reserve a place for you and your pooch!

If you have a pet behavior question or would like some training assistance,  
San Diego Humane Society is here to help!  
Visit our website at [www.sdhumane.org](http://www.sdhumane.org) to view our behavior and training options,  
or call our **Behavior Helpline at 619-299-7012 ext. 2244** to speak with a trainer.