

Exercise: Sit on The Dog

Equipment needed: Collar and Leash or Slip lead

Objective: This exercise starts the process of showing the dog how to quiet themselves down and self soothe around distractions or stressors, and employ self-control in these situations. You are also getting the dog used to releasing the tension on the collar and relaxing instead of fighting against the collar, which will be beneficial when teaching other things such as pressure sits, down, loose leash walking, etc.

STEP 1: Handler places the leash on the floor and steps on it while sitting in a chair or standing. The handle of the leash must be held as well to be sure the dog does not loosen up the distance at all. Give the dog just enough room to be able to move around a bit (stand, sit, lay down comfortably and a bit of room to roam)

STEP 2: Handler must have something else to do during this exercise so that they do not concentrate on their dog. You may only correct mouthing at the leash or jumping up on you, but nothing else. Let your dog whine, cry, tug at the leash etc. to figure out what is required of him. Corrections for leash mouthing or jumping up are simply to give a verbal “uh uh” correction then removing the leash from their mouth and/or gently but firmly nudging them off of you. You DO NOT want to talk to them or make any kind of significant eye contact while this exercise is being completed. Look away quickly and don't acknowledge them if you accidentally meet their eyes.

STEP 3: In the beginning stages of doing this exercise with a dog, it may take them more time to figure out what is wanted of them. In the beginning stages, we are looking for calming signals and calm behaviors from the dog. That is when we reward. Yawning, shaking off, sniffing the ground, other calming signals should be marked with “yes!” and rewarded immediately. The next step is to have the dog sit or lay down. Then the other calming signals will have an intermediate marker “good” NOT followed by food/affection reward. When the dog sits or lays down, we will mark with “Yes!” and reward accordingly. Eventually the “down” will be expected and we can start rewarding only for long periods of holding “down” or laying on their side, hip, etc.

STEP 4: If the dog is not making progress with this exercise and seems to be getting frustrated or restless, wait for him to give any sort of calming behavior or a down before releasing him. I would introduce a release word at this point such as "break" to indicate the exercise has ended. Example of this would be "Dog's name, break" and you get up as you say break.

****Distraction levels:**

- During the first two to three days, you want to work with mild to moderate distraction levels (someone makes a noise outside the door, claps, drops something, etc.)
- Once the dog has the idea of this, it's time to increase the distraction level. This could be introducing another person in the room and having the dog be in “down” position and holding it then only introducing “Break” when the dog is completely calm. This could also be going out to one of the play yards or somewhere outside where other dogs and people will be walking close by.
- Eventually, you can even work this exercise at the dog's kennel! You will want to start out by leashing the dog through the kennel door then closing it back. Continue to step on the leash and do this exercise until the dog calms down (at this point, dog does not need to lay down for an extended period of time. We're looking for calmness- slowed breathing, not jumping/barking/whining/panting/clawing etc., eye contact, sitting or laying down of course is a plus). When a dog first starts this part of the journey in the kennel, it will probably be more difficult since there are multiple types of stressors and distractions around.

****<https://www.mainedogtrainer.com/blog/sit-on-the-dog-exercise>**