



### ***Choosing Self Control***

Training sessions for these exercises should last no more than 15 minutes at a time, less if the dog is showing signs of tiredness. Adapt the exercises as necessary to suit the dog you are working with at the time.

### ***Self Control around Hands***

As a starting point for self control it is important the dog is able to control their desire to take the food and to work with food in the environment without becoming overly distracted or 'mugging' you, the trainer, for the food reward.

Firstly, assess the dog's current level of ability to manage themselves in the presence of a food reward in the hand of the trainer and teach them that the way to release the food from the trainer's hand is to back away from the food, rather than rushing towards it, pawing at it or employing other ways of attempting to take the food from the hand.

Start with a piece of dry kibble or other unappetising treat inside a closed fist, present the fist to the dog a small distance away from the dog's nose. Ignore any attempts to lick, nibble, paw the fist (no verbal reprimand / interrupter, or moving the hand in any way). Wait for the dog to show a small movement away from the hand and reward that movement by opening the fist to deliver the treat from a flat hand. Repeat until the dog shows an immediate movement away from the hand as it is presented.

Increase the value of the treat in the hand and repeat until the dog is again making a movement away from the hand on presentation.

Change the way in which the treat is presented from a fist to between thumb and forefinger (i.e. more accessible to the dog) and decrease the value of the treat back to kibble. For this stage of



training if the dog attempts to move toward the treat immediately remove the hand containing the treat without comment or eye contact. The dog is learning that attempting to access the treat loses the opportunity for reward. Re-offer the hand once the dog is calm again. Reward any movement away from the hand or offering of eye contact with the trainer by giving the treat. Give from a flat hand, also helping the dog to make a distinction that flat hand = reward available, whereas closed fist / thumb and forefinger = reward unavailable.

With dogs who offer behaviours in an attempt to obtain the treat, or with dogs who may become so frustrated they would bite in order to obtain the treat, ensure even the smallest movement away from the treat (even just an eye flick away) is rewarded by opening of the hand. The exercise can be started using treats under a cup rather than in a closed fist if necessary.

Once the dog is able to remain calm and move away from the hand or offer eye contact with the trainer when presented with multiple, high value treats held in the hand, they are ready to progress to the next stage. You can also use this method to teach control around toys or anything else the dog wants.

### ***Choosing Self Settle***

Training sessions for these exercises should last no more than 15 minutes at a time, less if the dog is showing signs of tiredness. Adapt the exercises as necessary to suit the dog you are working with at the time.

For many people, a dog that can relax in a distracting environment is highly desirable. The self settle differs from the 'Down' obedience behaviour because the dog is choosing to lie down in a relaxed manner and is able to observe the world around it, or fall asleep, without reacting and without focusing on the owner waiting for the next command. This is not an obedience Down:Stay where the dog is expected to remain in the same position until released or given another task to perform.



### ***Self Settle – Indoors***

The first stage of this training should take place in a distraction-free environment with the dog on a flat collar and lead at least 1.5m long to allow for you, the trainer, to keep hold of the end of the lead.

The trainer can sit in a chair or stand in a relaxed pose, placing one foot on the lead, holding the other end in their hand. The dog is allowed enough lead to stand, sit or lie down comfortably but not enough to jump up at the owner or move around. The trainer needs a store of treats to hand (in a treat bag / nearby pot etc). If you want to use this to teach your dog to relax on their bed at home, then ensure you're standing or sitting alongside their bed.

With a foot on the lead, actively ignore the dog ensuring no eye contact and complete disengagement. The trainer should not physically or verbally cue the dog to perform any behavior, just wait for the dog to show signs of relaxation such as sitting or lying down. Reward this relaxed behavior without giving eye contact, verbal or physical praise by slowly placing a food reward on the floor in front of the dog so the dog does not have to move to reach it. For highly persistent or owner-focused dogs it is necessary to reward very small behaviours such as looking away from the owner, and gradually build up to rewarding the more relaxed behaviours. For all dogs the aim is to shape and reward a relaxed down. For some dogs, you will notice that while their body may appear relaxed, their mind is focused on you and getting the food. Wait this out, and be ready to reward the instant the dog mentally switches off from the food initially. You can build up the relaxation duration gradually later on.

Once the dog has offered a relaxed behaviour and earned a reward, continue to reward the dog at a high enough frequency to keep the dog in the relaxed position. If the dog breaks the position, wait until the dog resumes the position before rewarding again. After a maximum of two minutes of rewarding relaxed behaviour, take your foot off the lead and make eye contact with the dog, encouraging them to move.



Then re-settle in exactly the same way in a different part of the room, rewarding as before. Once the dog is reliably self settling as soon as the trainer withdraws attention and puts their foot on the lead, start to add distractions such as someone walking past the dog, moving toys at a distance or opening the room door. The trainer continues to reward the dog with food on the floor in front of them during these distractions, increasing the reward rate as necessary to keep the dog in the relaxed position.

Once the dog is able to remain relaxed in the face of distractions, and the reward rate had slowed to less than one reward a minute, move the training outside or to a more distracting environment.

### ***Choosing Self Settle – Outside***

In a quiet corner of a field or park, with grass underfoot to encourage the dog to lie down if necessary, repeat the disengaged and foot on the lead position the trainer used indoors. As before, when the dog lies down (or is relaxed and un-reactive even if standing) reward with food placed in front of them. Keep the reward rate high enough to maintain the behaviour in this more distracting environment. After approximately 2 minutes of settled behaviour the trainer takes their foot off the lead and interacts with the dog, before moving to a different place and repeating the disengaged / foot on the lead pose. Increase or decrease the reward rate as necessary to keep the dog in the relaxed position.

Over time the rate of reinforcement can be reduced, and dogs will often choose to self settle whenever the owner disengages with them, whether on or off lead.

### ***Self Control in Everyday Life***

There are many instances in everyday life where we can encourage dogs to form habitual behaviours which may help to build their underlying level of self control strength and encourage calm behaviours. These include around the food bowl, the dinner table, doorways, going for walks, crates / car doors opening, lead being removed etc.

With all these examples the key difference from training these as obedience behaviours which happen on cue is that the dog performs these behaviours automatically without being prompted by the owner, showing inhibited behaviour until released. The emphasis shifts from the dog being told what to do in order to start the behaviour (ie go to bed) to being told what to do to end the behaviour (ie dog is calm when the car crate is opened, waits for the lead to be attached and only exits the crate when released to do so by the owner).

The habitual behavior can be anything e.g. a sit, a check in, calm behaviour that the owner decides is appropriate for the situation. To teach, for example, a habitual sit before the back door opens for access to the garden, first teach a sit as you would normally. Then, when the dog is at the door wanting to go outside, ask the dog to sit and open the door as the reward for sitting. Practise this for several days and then the next time the dog asks to go outside simply stand by the door and wait. Give the dog 10-15 seconds (at least) to work out what will get the door to open – they should already have some idea from the consistent requests to sit on the previous days – and as soon as they offer a sit then open the door. From this point always wait for the sit before opening the door. If the dog doesn't offer a sit then cue them as before and open the door when they respond.

Apply this process to all routine behaviours – teach the behaviour that you want in the context that you want but do not get it under full stimulus control (ie ensure the behaviour has a verbal or



physical cue of some sort, but do not eliminate the behaviour being offered without that cue), and then wait for the behaviour to be offered instead of giving the cue.

Sian Ryan  
Developing Dogs  
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