



Napa Valley Dog Training Club

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Getting Started at Home

Release Word

The purpose of this word is to let your dog know an exercise is finished. You will select your own release word, or short phrase, that is easy to remember and works for everyone in your home. This word tells your dog that the exercise is over (which is an important concept when helping a dog learn to remain in position for an extended period of time). Think of this word as your “off switch”. Cue words like “sit”, “down”, “stay” or “wait” are the “on switch” and your release word is the “off switch”.

Cue words like “dismissed”, “break”, “recess”, “all done”, “that’s enough”, and “at ease” all work well as release words. However, “okay” is *NOT RECOMMENDED* because it is used frequently in everyday conversations and this can lead to confusion for the dog.

At first your dog will not understand what this word means, so you will have to show him. Ask your dog to “sit”, reward the action with a small treat and then say your release word. At the release cue encourage him to break his position by clapping your hands and encouraging him to move. You *do not* have to reward the release with a goodie, but rather your enthusiastic praise should be the payoff. Take a 20-30 second break and repeat. Do this exercise a few times each day for no more than 10 repetitions at each session. Within a couple of days, your dog will understand the concept.



Marker Sound

This word, or sound, can be a powerful tool when trained and used correctly because it can speed up communication between you and your dog. It allows you to “mark” a successful behavior instantly and, after some time, the sound may also act as a reward itself.

Pick a single word that:

- Everyone in the household can say and remember.
- Can be said with a sharp, quick sound.
- Comes to mind when you are happy.
- Can’t be confused with other cue words or your dog’s name.

Words like “yes”, “yep” and “good!” are perfect examples of successful marker words.

TO BEGIN: Measure a portion of your dog’s meal into a cup, that way you’ll be sure you don’t over feed him/her. (Yes, your dog will be learning and getting a dinner at the same time – what a deal!)

- 1) Say the word and immediately give your dog a treat.
- 2) Repeat the word in varying contexts and in different locations throughout the day.
- 3) Practice this activity for a few days, with 10-15 repetitions at each training session.
- 4) The training is successful when the dog gets excited as soon as he hears the sound or word, but before he receives a treat.

Once your dog understands the marker sound you will use this to let him know he did something right. For example, you tell your dog to “sit”. As soon as his butt hits the floor you mark the behavior with an enthusiastic “Yes!” and deliver the reward. Now your dog knows that he has done something well.

WORD OF CAUTION:

- Be careful to mark the exact desired behavior that you want! Timing is important so try to stay focused. If you are late, even by a second, don't say anything. You will get another chance.

Name Game - Just the Two of You

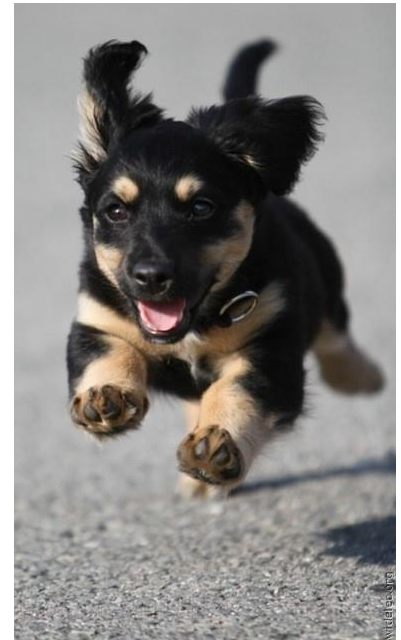
This game creates polite and relaxed eye contact with people, while reinforcing the dog's name. This is a great game for puppies, young dogs and rehomed dogs.

To start the Name Game, your dog should be off-leash and in a safe, controlled location. Make sure that the area is clear of loose items on the floor and is not a slippery surface. A room in the house or small portion of a yard is a good place to start.

Play this game at least twice each day for 3-5 minutes. If your dog gets distracted, cut the session short and/or move to another, less active location.

TO BEGIN: Measure a portion of your dog's meal into a cup, that way you'll be sure you don't over feed him/her. (Yes, this is the same idea as the Marker Sound above.)

- Hold several pieces of kibble in both hands. Let your dog know you have something yummy that he/she might be interested in.
- When the dog looks up at you, say his/her name in a Happy Voice (one time only). Then SLOWLY toss one kibble to the side of your body, only a few feet away. Make sure the dog can track the movement of your hand and see the kibble hitting the floor.
- As the dog is eating the food, get your other hand ready to repeat the toss in the opposite direction. When the dog looks at your face, say his/her name in a Happy Voice (again, one time only) and toss the kibble SLOWLY a few feet away.
- Repeat these steps, switching hands and tossing the food in opposite directions. Encourage your dog to look at your face after each piece of kibble. Always say his/her name when the dog makes eye contact. Keep the activity happy and fun.
- When you have only one piece of kibble left, call the dog to you and give the food when he/she is sitting or standing politely in front of you, looking at your face.
- Say your release word and move away from the dog. The game is done.



WORDS OF CAUTION:

- Keep in mind that your dog's name should be associated with positive things. This will help greatly when you start to work on recalls (aka “come”) and when in distracting locations.
- Please do not go overboard and make this game too difficult for the dog to receive a reward (food). Remember, this exercise is about reinforcing eye contact with people and responding to his/her name. A high success rate means your dog is learning.

Go to a Mat

Most dogs enjoy their crate / dog bed / special blanket and find resting in these locations comforting. Helping a dog find this same sense of safety outside of their home is an important tool. By teaching “Place” or “Go to Your Mat”, you’ll be providing your dog with a mobile safe place that can be taken anywhere.

You can teach this off-leash, however we recommend you start with the dog on-leash to ensure success. (By teaching this skill on-leash it has been suggested by canine behaviorists that a young dog will be able to relax while on-leash easier. This is a skill that can be very beneficial throughout a dog’s life.)

TO BEGIN: Remove your leashed dog from the area for a few minutes while you set up the materials. Select a special mat, towel, or other easy-to-carry-and-wash item. Measure a portion of your dog’s meal into a cup, that way you’ll be sure you don’t over feed him/her. (Yep, we use mealtime for training a lot!)



- 1) Place the dog’s mat on the floor.
- 2) Put several pieces of kibble on the mat, scattering them over the surface.
- 3) Get your dog and walk him/her calmly to the location of the mat. Allow the dog to discover the kibble you dropped for him/her.
- 4) When the dog is nearly done eating the kibble, drop a few more pieces onto the mat.
- 5) After only a few minutes you can start dropping one piece of kibble at a time on the mat near his/her front paws. You will need to add a new piece of kibble as the dog is finishing the previous one and is still looking at the mat.
- 6) Once the kibble is gone, say your release word and move away from the mat. The training is done. Pick up the mat and set it aside for the next training session.

Once your dog begins to understand that the special mat equals goodies, you can move it to other locations in your home and yard. Each time you will offer your dog kibble for touching the mat and nothing more (do not ask for obedience skills yet). Over time, and with practice, your dog will learn that the specific mat is a “special place” to relax. Once that happens, the mat can be moved anywhere (car, vet’s office, etc.) and your dog will be comfortable and calm.

WORDS OF CAUTION:

- DO NOT hand goodies to your dog directly while on the mat. It is important that he/she understand that making physical contact with the special mat brings the rewards. This means that your dog needs to keep its head down as much as possible, not staring at you.
- When introducing this skill, it is important that the dog understand this special mat is a “safe place” and NOT a training location. This means when you first begin teaching this skill DO NOT ask for any other behavior, like “sit” or “down”. If the dog is touching the mat in some way, then he/she gets a reward. However, give plenty of praise if your dog lies down or sits on its own.
- We recommend that your pet’s special mat / “safe place” **not** be used as punishment. If your dog begins to associate this location with bad situations, he/she will no longer be able to calm themselves while there. To use this skill to its fullest, your dog needs to feel safe and comfortable while on the special mat.