

Clicker Training

Sit and Stay

By Mary Woodward

Stay is a very basic command and one of the most useful. It's handy in so many situations and goes a long way to teaching your dog self-control. As with any new behavior, you want to start training in a quiet place, then start adding in distractions as your dog's response strengthens.

Many people are amazed at how quickly dogs pick this up! In our classes, we usually pick the wriggliest pup to demonstrate this one. It's fun to show how well it works.

Stand in front of your sitting dog. Say "Stay!" If he holds his position for a second or two, click & treat (C&T). If he gets up or lies down before you can C&T, then just have him sit again and start over. Do not "correct" him for breaking the stay - he doesn't even know what it is yet!

Work on this, doing it 5-6 times per session, gradually increasing the time by a couple of seconds at a time. When he can hold the stay for 10 seconds, then start taking small steps (1-2 at a time initially) back & forth in front of him. C&T immediately if he holds position while you are moving. Since the click ended the exercise, he might get up after hearing it. If he does, then lure him back to a sit before giving him the treat. At this point, you can add in the hand signal - a little wave with your palm facing him.

The cue "Stay" is only said at the beginning of each repetition - do NOT repeat it or hold up your hand during the stay as a signal the entire time.

Work up to a 30 second stay, still remaining within 3-4' of your dog. At that point, you want to start being variable with the time, getting longer & longer times but also occasionally C&T'ing after very short stays. This will make the behavior much stronger. For example, do a 60 sec Stay, then a 65 second one. Then 10 sec, 70, 67, 74, 15, 80, 3, 84, 76...

You will also start adding distance (being variable about it by including some closer stays as well), but remember that we only work on one part of a behavior at a time, so when you start going farther away you should reduce your time expectations. When both long stays (up close) and distance stays (for short times) are both reliable, you can start putting them together.



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As you add distance, you might be tempted to call your dog to you from the stay. Resist the urge! It helps to strengthen the stay if the dog can really settle, confident that you will be returning to him. Later, after working around distractions, you can sometimes do a recall from a stay.

Next steps involve having you move around more, having mild distractions, etc. Each time that you increase the difficulty by doing something like that, remember to back off on the difficulty of the other aspects - distance & time. Success breeds success! When you are ready to phase out the clicker, then you will release your dog from the stay with "Okay!" Be careful to never give the stay cue unless you are going to be watching that he does, indeed, stay, and that you always release him when he is done. If you forget, then he will learn to just release himself after a while.

The Down Stay is taught the same way - just have your dog in a down position first!

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