

Settling your dog

As part of your family, it's important for dogs to learn to relax, lie down, and have time on their own. It's especially important for them to do this when you're busy at home, with guests, making dinner, cleaning the house, or outside with friends at the pub or café. It's hard for your dog to learn to be settled when there are distractions, lots of activity or opportunities for attention so it's best to begin practicing somewhere quiet.



The Method

Start training at home and at times when your dog is more likely to be already relaxing. You'll know your dog is truly settled when they lie down, not asking for attention and isn't easily distracted by what's going on around them. Once your dog has learnt the basic objective of being settled, try training in different locations with more distractions. To begin with you may just need to reward your dog for any behaviour that is not staring at you, pulling on the lead, or barking.

- ❁ Sit quietly on a chair with your dog on the lead and a blanket on the floor. Drop tiny bite size treats to your dog as a reward for settling down on the blanket. Don't say anything to your dog whilst doing this.
- ❁ Gradually reward more relaxed behaviours – this will vary between dogs – some will automatically start lying down and you can quickly progress to rewarding your dog only for this behaviour before moving on to reward specific signs of relaxing like sighing, weight shifting and head resting.

- ❃ Some dogs will take longer and will struggle to stop pulling on the lead or staring at you. If this is the case with your dog, you'll need to take things more slowly by rewarding behaviour such as standing quietly, disengaging from people or sniffing their blanket.
- ❃ When they're relaxed, start increasing the time your dog must be settled before you reward them. Build up gradually a couple of seconds at a time, over multiple sessions.
- ❃ Once your dog is starting to get the hang of it and shifting their weight so they're comfortable and relaxing, you can start practising with them off lead – you need them to learn that they can settle down whether they on or off-lead, practising very useful skills!
- ❃ Slowly start building up distractions by practising the 'settle' in increasingly busy areas or ask a helper to create a distraction by walking past, progressing to more exciting activities like sweeping or skipping. If your dog becomes unsettled or gets up, ignore them and wait until they settle again before rewarding them. If they won't relax and settle, increase distance from the distraction or make it less interesting.



The owner drops a small treat into their dog's bed every now and again while working at the computer, so the dog knows this is a good place to rest and is rewarded for settling here.

Key points

- ❃ Initially reward any relaxed behaviour your dog shows, from sitting quietly, and not pestering you, build up to lying down and completely relaxing.
- ❃ Withdraw your attention when they become over-excited or unsettled; no touching, talking or making eye contact, just turn your back and ignore them.
- ❃ If you feel more confident then it's fine to keep your dog on lead with whilst training. Make sure you ask people not to interact with them whether they're settled or not- so they can completely relax!
- ❃ Try to resist telling your dog what to do during training, the aim is for them to learn for themselves to be calm and relax. This is a form of learning that requires your dog will learn to settle without needing to be asked.

Always make sure your dog is having a good time when settling, whether enjoying their toys, chews or simply dozing and snoozing!

These resources have been created by Dogs Trust using the most up-to-date scientific-based understanding of dog behaviour and welfare needs and can be freely downloaded by anyone interested in learning more about understanding dog behaviour and training dogs.