

Teaching a Place Cue

The goal of this training exercise is to create a “rewarding” place for your dog to go, lie down, and stay. This is great for building self-control and independence, managing one or multiple dogs, and encouraging relaxation.

Step 1: Use a mat or bed that is not typically where your dog sleeps. Walk towards the mat with her. When they step on it, mark the behaviour with a click, and lure them into a down using food. Don't say anything. While your dog is in the down position, mark and reward multiple times, waiting a few seconds between rewards. Then offer a release cue “Okay” and let them get up off the mat. The goal of step 1 is to have your dog offer the



“down” automatically. Continue to mark when they step on the mat but now wait for them to offer the down; if they don't, help out by luring them into position, then finish up the round and try again. *If your dog offers the down 5 out of 5 times, move on to step 2. If they offer the down only 3 out of 5 times, stick with this step until they offer the down automatically. If they offer the down less than 3 out of 5 times, go back to luring them into the down. Remember not to say anything to your dog just yet!*

Step 2: Walk towards the mat with your dog. When they step on it, stand still and wait for them to offer a down (this should be automatic). Mark when they offer the down, not before. Begin saying “Place” or “Go to place.” While your dog is in the down, mark and reward multiple times, waiting a few seconds between rewards. Then offer a release cue and let them get up off the mat. We will start to add distance to the exercise by stopping farther and farther away from the mat. Initially, stop a few inches away from the spot where you've been sending your dog to the mat. As long as they keep going to and lying on the mat, you can increase the distance between it and your stopping point. *If your dog offers the down with distance 5 out of 5 times, start adding more distance. If your dog offers the down only 3 out of 5 times, stick with this step until they offer the down automatically and on the mat. If they offer the down less than 3 out of 5 times, go back to the distance from the mat at which they were previously successful.*

Step 3: Once your dog is comfortable being sent to the mat from farther away, begin adding distance away during their stay. Move away from your dog while they're in the down: walk around them, move to another room, jump up and down, or stand out of sight. *As long as your dog stays in the down with this distance, move to step 4. If they get up, go back to the distance at which they were previously successful and work from there.*

Step 4: Now that your dog understands “go to place” means go, lay down, and stay, we can begin to add distractions, whether that be a bouncing ball, another dog, a radio playing, or treats on the floor. We want your dog to stay on the mat throughout these distractions. If they get up, it means that particular distraction was just too much for them. Lower the level of distraction and try again. This can be the most difficult step. We want to set our dogs up for success, so if a tennis ball is



their absolute favourite toy, we will wait to use that distraction until they have performed reliably with less exciting diversions.

Step 5: When your dog has fully learned the place cue, you can take it on the road! Use it at the cottage, friends' houses, the vet, wherever. Remember that building distance (how far away you are), duration (how long your dog holds the stay) and distractions (all the fun stuff they'd rather be doing) need to be taught separately. If they start to fumble, take them back to the stage/environment at which they were last successful. Don't be discouraged and remember to have fun with your dog!

