

Settle

Your high energy pooch can't seem to get the concept of "relaxation." You've tried longer walks, marathon games of fetch, or going to the dog park, but she is still bouncing off the walls. A calm state of mind remains a distant concept, inaccessible and far off. Dogs aren't particularly great at self-regulating their excitement levels, so the concept of "calm" is a learned skill. Actively teaching your dog to "settle" on cue is a great way to help them access their off switch.

"Settle" means to relax lying down on one hip for an extended period of time (several minutes) on a mat or rug. This exercise teaches your dog to lie quietly at your side while you are otherwise engaged.

How to train it:

1. Sit in a chair with your dog next to you and invite her to lie down. Lure her into a down position if necessary.
2. Once she lies down, say "Yes!" and give her a treat. Then, quickly mark and treat again - before she has time to get up. Try to get her to rock onto one hip by moving the treat to the side and toward her ribs. She should be relaxed, not poised to leap into action.
3. Continue to say "Yes!" and treat several times while she is down, then say your release word ("Break," "Release," "Okay") and invite her to stand again.
4. Gradually increase the time between rewards, so she is staying down on her own, waiting for the next "yes" calmly.
5. Once she will remain down with only a few treats for 20 seconds or more, add the verbal cue "Settle" before luring her into a "down." Eventually you can drop the "down" cue and just cue her to "settle."
6. Continue to decrease your rate of reinforcement (the number of times you say "yes" and treat) until she can lie quietly at your feet for an extended period with very little reinforcement.

Troubleshooting:

If your dog won't lie still for very long, shorten the amount of time you're asking her to settle. Watch her closely and try to release her before she gets up on her own. Very gradually increase the length of time you ask her to remain settled.

If your dog won't lie still **at all**, she probably has too much energy! When you start teaching this cue, try practicing after she's had a good, hard exercise session and you know she's tired. Set her (and yourself!) up to succeed.

If your dog won't settle when multiple people are in the room, work on adding one new person at a time. After an exercise session, practice with just one other person in the room. Ask your helper to sit quietly in one spot and ignore the dog. Very gradually add bits of activity, conversation, and/or different/additional humans.

Tips!

This cue is great to practice while watching television. You're just hanging out anyway!

Check out our handout about [Puzzle Toys](#). Encouraging your dog to exercise her brain can aid in teaching her how to slow down and enjoy a quiet moment.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.

Oregon Humane Society | 1067 NE Columbia Blvd. | Portland, OR 97211
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