

# Positive Start Puppy Guide



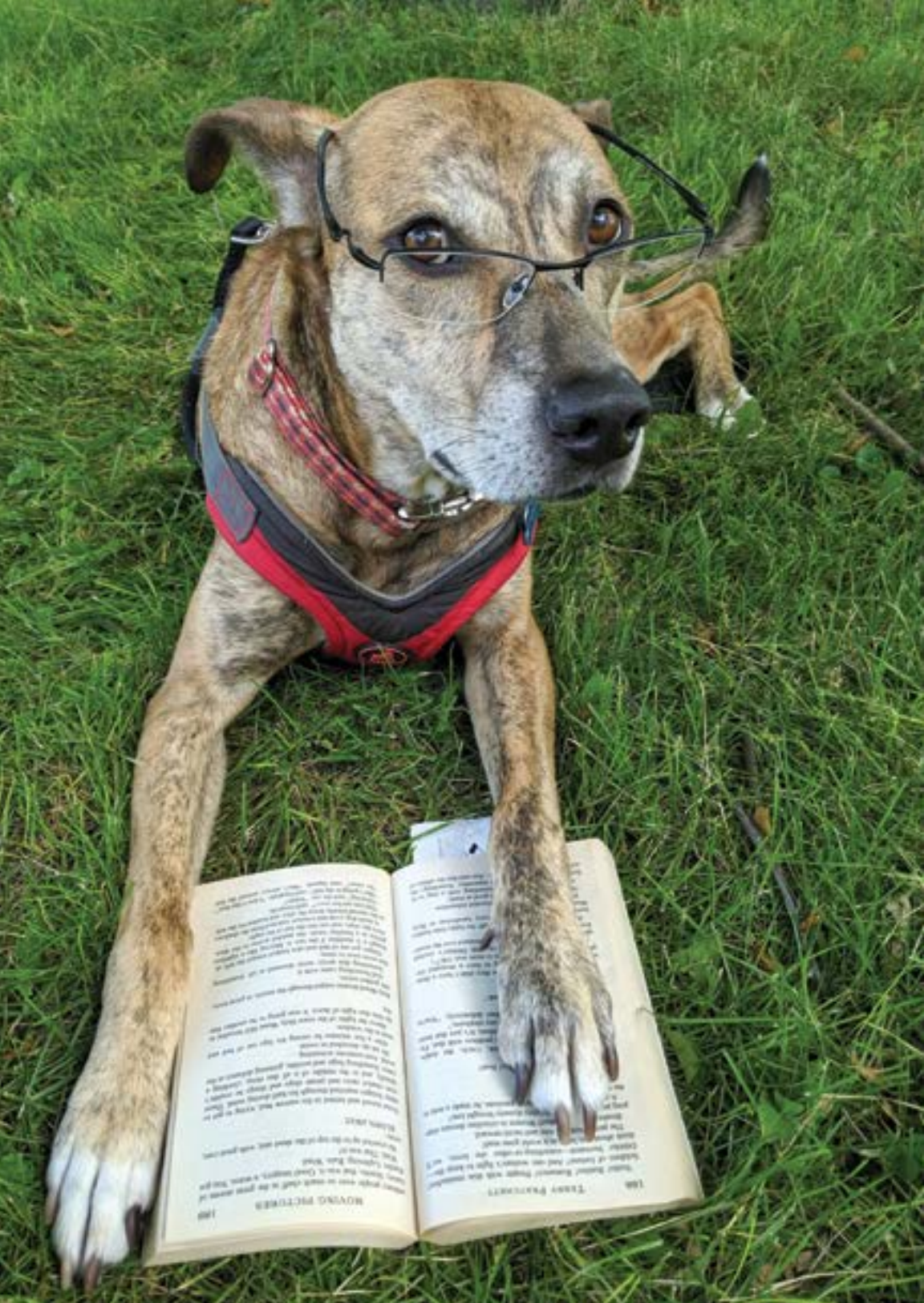
BAYSHORE  
ANIMAL CLINIC

Congrats on your new puppy!  
We've put together this guide for you,  
rich with resources & tips. Enjoy.



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# Recommended Reading



1. **Puppy Start Right: Foundation Training for the Companion Dog**  
- Debbie Martin and Kenneth M. Martin
2. **The Puppy Primer** - Patricia B. McConnell
3. **Perfect Puppy in 7 days: How to Start Your Puppy Off Right** - Sophia A. Yin
4. **The Ultimate Guide to Raising a Puppy: How to Train and Care for Your New Dog**  
- Victoria Stilwell





# Toy Guide



Focus on long lasting toys and rotating them, instead of smaller, more disposable toys that can become gastrointestinal obstructions.

Watch out for toys that can break teeth! Steer clear of antler bones, elk bones, or very hard plastic toys. Skip the grocery store aisle and check out the availabilities online or in pet stores.

If you have a large breed or power-chewer pup, skip the puppy toys and go straight to the adult stuff! Let them grow into them, which will be adorable along the way.

**Kong** brand toys can be used to provide prolonged entertainment by stuffing the toys with food such as spray cheese, cream cheese, peanut butter, low-fat yogurt, whipped cream, canned baby food, etc. They can even be used frozen or stuffed with kibble to slow feeding times.

## Brand Recommendations

1. Playology – Scented Rubber Toys – [Playologypets.com](https://www.playologypets.com)
2. Tuffy Toys – [Dogtuff.com](https://www.dogtuff.com)
3. Kong – [Kongcompany.com](https://www.kongcompany.com)
4. Outward Hound – [Outwardhound.com](https://www.outwardhound.com)
5. GoDog - [Godogfun.com](https://www.godogfun.com)





# Harness & Leash



**It is never too early to start** introducing grass and walks! Let your puppy explore their world but, get a well-fitting leash and harness to keep them safe.

**Stay away from retractable leashes.** Don't give your puppy a moving target to figure out their limits! It is also much safer for the small breed pupperonis since you can ensure they stay close to you.

Harnesses are great options for all dogs but especially recommended for breeds with proclivities for neck or back injuries such as, **French Bulldogs, English Bulldogs, Dachshunds, and Beagles.**

**Fit matters; research different types** and avoid those that may interfere with natural shoulder movement or otherwise cause discomfort.

## OVERVIEW: HOW TO GUIDES

[Positively.com/dog-training/methods-equipment/training-equipment/\\_head-collars-no-pull-harnesses](https://positively.com/dog-training/methods-equipment/training-equipment/_head-collars-no-pull-harnesses)

[SFSPCA.org/resource/head-halters-and-harnesses](https://sfspca.org/resource/head-halters-and-harnesses)

[Petsafe.net/collars-leashes-harnesses](https://petsafe.net/collars-leashes-harnesses)

[Positively.com/dog-behavior/basic-cues/loose-leash-walking](https://positively.com/dog-behavior/basic-cues/loose-leash-walking)

## Brand Recommendations

1. Easy Walk Harness - [Petsafe.net/easywalk](https://petsafe.net/easywalk)
2. Gentle Leader Head Collar- [Petsafe.net/gentleleader](https://petsafe.net/gentleleader)
3. Sure-Fit Harness – [Store.petsafe.net/sure-fit-harness](https://store.petsafe.net/sure-fit-harness)
4. Positively No-Pull Harness - [Positively.com/news/introducing-the-newly-redesigned-positively-no-pull-harness](https://positively.com/news/introducing-the-newly-redesigned-positively-no-pull-harness)





# Socialization



The current recommendations by boarded Veterinary Behaviorists are to start socialization **as soon as possible after puppies receive their initial round of vaccines and fecal screening.**

Yes! This means socialize even **before they are fully vaccinated**, which will not occur until 15-17 weeks of age.

Socialization **does not equal dog parks.** Overwhelming your puppy socially can be detrimental.

**Quality of interactions is paramount over quantity.** Ensure every interaction is controlled, limited in terms of people and animals, and is positive!

**Puppy training classes and grooming early** can be great socialization experiences!

Don't forget exposure to novel experiences and environments, such as car drives, beaches, hikes, dog bars, and visiting cats/birds/children all can help contribute to having a well-adjusted puppy for human life.

## References

1. American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior: Position Statement on Puppy Socialization: - [AVSAB.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Puppy-Socialization-Position-Statement-FINAL.pdf](https://www.avsab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Puppy-Socialization-Position-Statement-FINAL.pdf)
2. SFSPCA Puppy Socialization - [SFSPCA.org/resource/puppy-socialization](https://www.sfspca.org/resource/puppy-socialization)
3. Positively by Victoria Stilwell - [Positively.com/dog-behavior/puppy-knowledge/puppy-socialization](https://www.positively.com/dog-behavior/puppy-knowledge/puppy-socialization)





# Crate Training



The process of getting your puppy to feel comfortable and enjoy the crate can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days, but **it's important not to rush and keep it positive!**

Crate training is a **recommended method for all dogs, no matter the size.** When done correctly it can provide a safe, calming, personalized space for your puppy that is even travel friendly!

Crate training **in the bedroom during the evenings** is helpful so they will not feel as lonely, especially when so recently removed from litter mates and mom.

Consider **using the crate for mealtimes**, including shutting and locking the door (for a short period of time) to create positive associations and help desensitize to the door locking.

Practice providing alone time in the crate when introducing new toys.

If your puppy begins to whine, make sure you only let them out when they are quiet. **Wait for at least five seconds of quiet before you open the crate door.** This will help them to learn what behavior opens the door. You can also consider giving a command, such as sit, prior to opening the door which will help prevent jumping or clawing at the crate door to be associated with being let out.

**Consider utilizing a word or phase as a cue**, such as: Go to your room, Bat cave, Go to Bed, or Crate up! Link the word every time they enter the crate regardless of whether you asked them to go into it first. This can help create an easy command in the future for them to return to it.

**Crate training is all about getting them to relax in the crate** (not just "used to it"). If you have any questions or difficulties with these steps feel free to reach out for additional advice.



## Crate Training Techniques

Courtesy of SF SPCA

### PHASE 1: THE FIRST DAY

1. Throw tiny, yummy treats into the crate. When your puppy goes in to get them, praise them.
2. When your puppy is happily venturing into the crate, begin practicing closing the door for a few seconds while treating them through the opening. Then let them right back out. Repeat the exercise many times, building up to 10 seconds.

### PHASE 2: THE NEXT FEW DAYS

1. Repeat exercise two from above. Then stuff a puppy KONG with extra-special goodies/or another time-consuming treat. Put the KONG in the crate and close the door behind your puppy as they go to eat it. Go about your business in the house, then let your puppy back out after five minutes. Do this without any fanfare whatsoever.
2. Repeat the exercise several times in the next couple of days using a yummy/safe chew or toy. Vary the absences from one to 20 minutes. Ignore your puppy if he whines or barks; always wait to let them out until they have been quiet for at least a few seconds.

### PHASE 3: LEAVING THE HOUSE

1. Leave your puppy in the crate with something gourmet in his KONG, and then leave the house for brief errands such as collecting your mail or watering the garden.
2. Over the next few sessions, gradually extend the duration of your absences. Go from one minute to five minutes to 10, 15, or 30 minutes, depending on your puppy's age (see below). Once they are used to longer absences, then practice alternating length of times

### A TIME GUIDE TO CRATING PUPPIES:

**8–10 WEEKS: up to one hour**

**11–12 WEEKS: up to two hours**

**13–16 WEEKS: up to three hours**

**> 16 WEEKS/ 4 MONTHS: up to four hours**

## Crate Training Techniques

Courtesy of Positively by Victoria Stilwell

### QUICK TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE THE CRATE A COMFORTING PLACE:

- Use bedding and safe toys. Monitor at first to ensure no ingestion.
- Leave the door open to the crate so your puppy can investigate.
- Encourage your puppy to go in the crate by throwing a favorite treat or toy inside.
- Do not close the door to the crate until your puppy is comfortable and relaxed in the crate.
- Begin closing the door for a few seconds at a time, gradually building up the duration as long as your puppy stays relaxed.
- At this stage, give your puppy a durable rubber chew toy with some food inside while in the crate.
- Do not rush this process – gradually increase distance between yourself and the crate.
- If your puppy whines or barks, wait until they are quiet before opening the door to let them out.
- Feeding your puppy's meals in the crate will help build a positive association.
- Your puppy should always have access to water. Using a non-spill bowl can be helpful.

### WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Never force your puppy inside the crate.
- Never use the crate as a punishment when puppy misbehaves.
- Do not rush the crate-training process or you will end up with a puppy that is fearful of the crate.
- Do not leave your puppy in the crate for longer than they can hold themselves. Doing so will force them to have accidents and make the house training process a lot harder.





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### Example Crate Training Schedule

**8am** Take your puppy out of the crate to toilet as soon as they wake up.

**8:30am** Feed your puppy the first meal of the day. Leave the food down for twenty minutes and pick up any leftovers. Then take puppy outside immediately after eating and give them time to toilet again.

**9am** Your puppy can now have supervised free time in the home, as long as they have toileted outside first. If not, put them back in the crate for 5 minutes, take them back outside for 10 minutes, and repeat until they have urinated or defecated.

**9:30am** Take your puppy to their crate for an unsupervised nap or some play time.

**10:30am** Take your puppy out to toilet again if they are awake.

**12pm** If your pup is eating three meals a day, feed them around this time. When they are six months old you can reduce feeding to twice a day. Leave the food down for twenty minutes and pick up what is left. Take them out to toilet immediately after feeding.

**12:30-2:30pm** Puppy goes back into their crate for a nap, play, or chew time.

**2:30pm** Take your puppy out to toilet.

**3-5pm** Give your puppy half an hour of full supervised home access only after they have toileted and follow that with unsupervised time in the crate.

**5pm** Give your puppy the last daily feeding. Leave the food down for twenty minutes and remove any food that remains. Take them out immediately after feeding to toilet.

**6pm-bedtime** Use a mixture of crate and supervised free time in the home, and/or access to outside for toilet breaks.





# Puppy Handling



It is very important to start habituating your puppy to human touch as soon as possible! The more you can introduce human touch in regular, gentle, and comfortable ways for your puppy, the less those interactions will provoke anxiety in the future.

Touch helps form emotional bonds, provides comfort from birth, and is critical to forming social connection with humans.

Level of touch is also important – too light may tickle or irritate, and too hard may hurt or trigger a fear response. It is therefore critical to not just handle, but also to adjust based on your puppy's response.

**It is important for all handling to not just be performed by one person.** The more the merrier. That way, your puppy can feel comfortable with all humans and not just one. It is critical, however, that these interactions are **positive**. Careful supervision of proper handling and monitoring your puppy's comfort/reactions, will help ensure that they will look forward to meeting people in the future.



## Puppy Handling: Picking Up Your Puppy

- Some puppies may startle or be uncomfortable when being picked up, especially if they were not introduced to it at a young age.
- Ensure first, that it is not due to the style of hold, potentially causing discomfort or not securing the whole body, creating the feeling of instability.
- If you note anxiety or discomfort – start to introduce a cue such as a word or sound prior to picking puppy up, to avoid a startle reflex.
- Combine being handled with a treat/praise and putting them back down in a short amount of time, so they can more gradually acclimate.
- Choose the timing of being picked up with happy interactions such as game time, favorite toys, or after mealtimes.
- Perform short pickup exercises multiple times throughout the day. Gradually increase the length of time of the pickup as they get more comfortable.

## Puppy Handling: Mouth & Ears

- It's important that your puppy is comfortable with you handling every part of their body, and the mouth is especially important for future dental health.
- Practice lifting the lips, rubbing your fingers against the teeth and gums, as well as opening the mouth –always follow up with a lot of praise and other types of rewards.
- Dental health is critical, especially in small dogs! **Consider starting tooth brushing or dental wipes as early as possible**, including with the baby teeth, to help create comfort with the routine.
- Consider practicing mouth exercises prior to mealtimes and finish with feeding some of the kibble pieces by hand. This may also prevent food insecurities that can manifest as aggression.
- Ear infections are a common problem for Floridian dogs due to a combination of water exposure and allergens.
- Ensure comfort for cleanings and handling starts young!
- During times when your puppy is already relaxed, practice transitioning the standard petting stroke into rubbing the ears, and progressing to gently pinching the ear flaps, lifting the pinna to open the canals, and putting fingers in the canals themselves.
- **Always finish with a treat and praise, and keep the sessions short and sweet!**

## Puppy Handling: Nail Trims

- Every dog will need their nails trimmed but not every dog is comfortable with it. Even if you do not plan to trim the nails yourself in the future, handling the paws, toes, and nails is important for them so they won't be afraid of it in the future.
- Starting with frequent, positive experiences from a young age is critical!
- **Go slow! And focus on how comfortable your puppy is with the handling prior to step progression. Don't start with the trimming!**
- Start with handling the leg, then the paw, touching the toes, separating the toes and interdigital webbing, gently pinching the toes, and progressing to pinching the nails and nailbeds. After they are comfortable with each step you can start to pair it with the trimming.
- When trimming a puppy's nails – utilize a tool that is nail size appropriate and that you feel comfortable using. For very small dogs you can even consider human nail trimmers.
- **Don't trim all four paws at once when training!** Start with one or two nails and only continue further if they are comfortable and not showing signs of anxiety or discomfort. Eventually you will be able to trim all the paws in one session however patience is key. A negative experience of being wrestled, and held down, is often a more lasting trigger for anxiety than quipping the nailbed accidentally.
- **Watch the videos for force-free nail handling techniques!**  
[DrSophiayin.com/videos/entry/training\\_a\\_dog\\_to\\_enjoy\\_toenail\\_trims](https://DrSophiayin.com/videos/entry/training_a_dog_to_enjoy_toenail_trims)  
[YouTube.com/watch?v=VcjEhriDJo0](https://YouTube.com/watch?v=VcjEhriDJo0)  
[YouTube.com/watch?v=gAzup4LwIVo](https://YouTube.com/watch?v=gAzup4LwIVo)

### Additional Resources for Handling Training:

- [Dogmantics.com/the-importance-of-handling](https://Dogmantics.com/the-importance-of-handling)
- [Positively.com/dog-behavior/puppy-knowledge/puppy-training-basics/habituating-puppy-to-human-touch](https://Positively.com/dog-behavior/puppy-knowledge/puppy-training-basics/habituating-puppy-to-human-touch)
- [SFSPCA.org/resource/handling-your-puppy](https://SFSPCA.org/resource/handling-your-puppy)





# Training Basics



1. Sit | Down
2. Stay
3. Alone Time
4. Drop It
5. Leave It

## Training Basics: Sit

Teaching the 'sit' cue is a foundational tool that can be used when you need your puppy to focus their attention.

**STEP 1:** Stand in front of your dog to present a treat between your thumb and your fingers. Place your hand within an inch of your dog's nose, fingers pointing up, palm facing up. Slowly lure your dog into a sitting position by bringing your hand forward and up over their nose a little. (If your dog jumps, you've moved your hand too far away or too far upward.) Your dog will shift their weight back and lower their hind end. When your dog's rear hits the ground, click (or say "yes!") and give the treat.

**STEP 2:** Step back so your dog must stand up to follow you and repeat the exercise. Do this until your dog easily follows the lure into a sit.

**STEP 3:** Next, get rid of the treat as a lure. Face your dog and hold your hand (without the treat) in front of your dog in the same hand signal as before with the treat. Move your hand in the same way as before. When your dog sits, click and treat from the other hand. Repeat this step several times in different places around the house.

**STEP 4:** Now it's time to add the verbal cue. Face your dog, say "sit," and give the hand signal. When your dog sits, click and treat. Keep practicing this step until your dog sits nine out of ten trials using the verbal cue and hand signal.

**STEP 5:** Now try without the hand signal. Say "sit" and if your dog sits, click and treat. (If your dog needs a little guidance, show them your palm and indicate the upward movement.) Keep practicing this step until your dog reliably sits when given the verbal cue.



### Helpful Tips:

1. Remember to say "sit" only once. Otherwise, you water down the word.
2. If your dog is having trouble with any step, go back a step and practice that until it's solid before you move on.
3. Refrain from pushing your dog's rear end down—otherwise you will have to do that for a cue. The cue should be the hand signal and the verbal cue—you should not have to physically touch your dog for the command.
4. As with any cue, teach this in short increments so that your dog does not get bored, and be aware of your pup's physical comfort in body position.



## Training Basics: Down

Teaching the 'down' cue takes a little patience but is a valuable cue for your dog to know and can help with learning impulse control.

**STEP 1:** Standing in front of your puppy cue the sit and provide reward. Next, hold a treat within an inch of their nose using a flat hand with your fingers pointing toward your dog (this becomes the hand signal). Lure your dog into the down position by bringing your hand down toward the floor between their legs. Move slowly, so your dog's nose follows, and they don't lose interest.

**STEP 2:** When your dog's elbows hit the ground, they will probably sink into the down position. If so, click (or say "yes!") and release the treat. If their elbows hit the ground but their rear has gone up, move your hand away from their like you're tracing a line on the floor. As soon as they are in the down position, click or cue and reward.

**STEP 3:** Step back so your puppy stands to follow you and repeat the exercise. Get a sit, then lure a down position again. Do this 10-25 times until they easily follow the lure into a down position.

**STEP 4:** Next lure the down without a treat. Face your puppy with your hand (without the treat) in front in the same hand signal as before. If your dog lies down, click or praise, then reward with the other hand. Repeat this step several times in different places around the house.

**STEP 5:** Now it's time to add the verbal cue. Face your dog, say "down," and give the hand signal. When your dog lies down, click/praise and feed a treat. Keep practicing this step until your dog gets it right nine out of ten trials using the verbal cue and hand signal.

**STEP 6:** Now try without the hand signal. Say "down" and if your dog lies down, click/praise and treat. If your dog needs a little guidance, show them your hand and indicate the downward movement. Keep practicing until your dog reliably lies down when given the verbal cue.

**STEP 7:** After they have mastered steps above challenge your puppy with more distracting areas, such as your yard, a quiet neighborhood street, or someone else's house. Eventually, your dog will be able to lie down on cue at the park or the local café. Also practice increasing the length of time your dog stays in the down position before giving the treat.

**STEP 8:** When your dog is consistently lying down even with distraction, you can begin to use the treats less frequently. Now only fast downs will earn your dog a treat, whereas a slow response gets them a pat on the head and a "good dog!" Also be sure to use "life rewards" to strengthen your dog's response. Ask for a down before throwing a ball, allowing them onto the couch, getting their leash, etc.

## Training Basics: Stay

The secret to teaching your dog to 'stay' is to not move through the stages too fast. Build the cue up gradually, lengthening the time, and distance of the stay. This cue teaches your dog impulse control skills and can be used to help fight separation anxiety.

### STAGE 1: DISTANCE

**STEP 1:** Stand in front of your dog, facing then, then ask for a sit (or down). Click or praise and treat that first sit to get your dog interested.

**STEP 2:** Say "stay" in a cheerful tone, pause, put out your right hand in the stay signal (hand out in front of you with palm facing dog), then mark with a treat (+/- clicker) immediately before your dog has a chance to move. Repeat this several times.

**STEP 3:** Ask your dog to sit (or down), then click and treat. Tell your dog "stay" in a cheerful tone, pause, put your right hand out in the stay signal. Next, move one of your shoulders back a bit, then immediately click and treat before your dog has a chance to move.

**STEP 4:** After moving your shoulder without your dog reacting a few times, repeat the procedure, but also take a small step back with one foot, immediately bringing it back in, and then clicking and treating right away.

**STEP 5:** When your dog has done several successful stays with one small step back, try taking two steps back, then clicking and treating. Repeat several times, and then increase the number of steps.

### STAGE 2: DURATION

**STEP 1:** To add length of time to your dog's stay, scale back on the distance. Face your dog, and warm up by doing a few short stays, moving only a couple of steps back.

**STEP 2:** Once your dog is into the game, take a couple of steps back, pause for one second, click, return, then click and treat. Do this a few times and, if your dog is having success, pause for slightly longer than return. Continue the pattern gradually increasing the pause length.

**STEP 3** If your dog gets up, don't say anything, go back to your dog, ask for a sit (or down), go back to an easier step, and then work your way back up.



## Training Basics: Stay, Continued

### STAGE 3: DISTRACTION

**STEP 1:** Start this part of the exercise in a low-traffic area such as your front yard, a quiet neighborhood, or a relatively empty park. Let your dog check the area out a bit so they are not as distracted by the newness of it.

**STEP 2:** Ask for a few sits (or downs) and praise/click and treat each one to get your dog warmed up. Holding onto their leash, start with easy bungee stays and, if no one is around and they are doing well, work on getting longer duration stays.

**STEP 3:** Keep your eye on your surroundings so you can watch for potential distractions. As soon as your dog sees something interesting while they remain in a stay, praise/click and treat immediately. Timing is everything. If you were going for a 15-second stay, scrap it and click as soon as they see something. The point is to praise/click your pup before they have a chance to make a mistake.

**STEP 4:** With consistent response you can start delaying the time between the stay command and the reward. If your puppy gets up, don't worry or comment, just walk them away a few steps to set up again. The next time, be sure not to wait as long.

### STAGE 4: COMBINATION

Combine the **Distance, Duration, and Distraction** challenges slowly and carefully. If your dog is having great success, begin slowly adding more challenge such as a short wait at the end of a distance stay, or try adding a couple of seconds between when your dog sees a distraction and when you click, etc.

### Helpful Tips:

1. When practicing duration stays be sure to vary the amount of wait times, short and long.
2. Make sure you are not changing too many variables at once. Only work on one thing at the time: either distance or duration until they are masters before combining challenges.
3. When you make one thing harder, make something else easier. If you add a pause onto your distance stays, do so at a smaller distance than before you added the pause.
4. When you practice in a new place, set your 3 D's accordingly based on the novelty of the place and how distracting it is. Compensate by making duration and distance easier.
5. If your dog is failing, go back to something easier and work slowly up to the harder stuff. Keep it at a level where your dog is getting it right and having fun.

## Training Basics: Alone Time

**STEP 1:** Practice stay (sit-stay or down-stay) until your dog can stay while you take a few steps away and then return.

**STEP 2:** Have your dog practice the stay command while you place a small piece of food on the floor a few feet in front of them. Go slowly and hover over the food (stay crouched down) so your dog doesn't steal it. Wait until he is relaxed and then give them a release command (such as "OK" or "Release") and let them eat the food.

**STEP 3:** Gradually work up to the point where you can place various pieces of food on the floor and stand up before you give the release command. Every puppy progresses through this step at their own pace. Practicing this slowly, and using your patience is key to your dog's success.



**STEP 4:** Next, you're ready to take a step toward the door before releasing your dog. Increase step by step until you can actually walk out the door. Each new step becomes the point at which you give the release command. The steps include: walk up to the door, briefly touch the door knob, rattle the doorknob, open and close the door, go part way through the door, and go completely through the door but leave the door open.

**STEP 5:** Once you are ready to close the door and be out of the room for a very brief period, give your dog multiple treats plus a long-lasting, very special treat such as a stuffed KONG, whipped cream or peanut butter, as the Jackpot. At first, close the door for only 10 seconds, then 20 seconds, and so on. Increase the time you remain outside very slowly.

### Helpful Tips:

1. Go slowly enough that your dog doesn't become distressed by your departure.
2. The goal is for your dog to be glad to see you go because he only gets these food treats when you play this leaving game. If you see your dog becoming more anxious during this game, slow down the steps, or considering scheduling a consultation with us or a local trainer.



## Training Basics: Drop It

You can help prevent resource guarding from ever developing by teaching your puppy to trade and give up objects, while making the experience a game.

It is also a great tool to prevent them from eating dangerous things like chocolate, grapes, gum, or from chewing on expensive shoes or electronics.

### METHOD 1 – “TAKE IT/DROP IT”

#### STAGE 1 – THE TRADE:

- Start with 2 identical low value objects (such as identical toys). Keep one hidden behind your back then present the other to your puppy.
- When they open their mouth to grab it say a cue, such as “take it”.
- Allow them to play with the object for a minute – then present a duplicate toy you kept hidden.
- At this point, the dog will have to choose to drop the toy in their mouth in order to get the new one.
- When they start to open their mouth to drop it say a cue, such as “drop it” and quickly reward them with the duplicate toy they are now interested in using the same cue used previously, “take it”.

#### STAGE 2 – ADDING VALUE:

Only progress to this step once your puppy has learned to respond to the cues given above consistently.

This part is crucial to practice so in situations with new exciting objects your puppy will still respond to the trained cues.

- If they do not want to give up the higher-value toy, walk away from them, produce a new toy, and start directing all your interest to that new toy while you play with it.
- Most likely their curiosity will get the better of them, and they will come over and give up the toy they have in their mouth.
- Immediately reward their decision by giving them a new toy and repeating the “take it”, “drop it” sequence.

### METHOD 2 – CATCHING BEHAVIOR AND USING TREATS

**STEP 1:** Pick an object your puppy is already used to playing with such as a ball or toy. When your puppy already has something in their mouth, approach with a small, smelly treat they are already familiar with and like so will quickly identify this as something they want.



**STEP 2:** Show your puppy the treat and offer it close, and when they open their mouth to get the treat use a cue such as, “drop it”, “release”, or “give”. While your puppy is eating the treat pick up the object then quickly return it when they are finished eating.

**STEP 3:** Repeat this sequence – “offer treat; say cue; dog drops object; give treat; give object back” – with short sessions daily. Gradually incorporate more and more objects into the training.

**STEP 4:** When your puppy seems to be getting used to the game – start to give your drop cue first, before presenting the treat. This shifts the sequence to – “say cue; dog drops object; offer/give treat; give object back”. Getting the treat and the toy back is doubly rewarding.

**STEP 5:** After the consistency is built up and your puppy is responding to every drop cue, you can begin to phase out the treat reward. To do this only provide the treat during random times during the session (think slot machine: sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t – but you still play). This will help your drop cue to be more lasting in the future whether you have a treat on you or not.

**Note:** If your dog ever aggressively guards items (growls, bares their teeth, barks, or snaps), then you may need the support of an expert to help so contact us for resources.

### Helpful Tips:

1. If your dog snaps the treats out of your hand, toss the treat on the ground after they release the object.
2. Remember never to physically take away the toy. Always wait until they drop it, give them a treat, and then pick up the toy to toss or give to play with again.
3. Only move on to non-toy objects when you are 100% certain your dog will drop any toy, anytime, anywhere.
4. Practicing in different environments, including on walks will help reinforce that your drop cue means anytime, anywhere.
5. Choose your cue words (aka commands) wisely and be consistent! Make sure everyone training is speaking the same language to get results faster and more consistently.



## Training Basics: Leave It

The 'leave it' cue is a fundamental skill that helps teach your puppy impulse control and can be greatly important in potentially dangerous situations. The 'it' in question might be a toxic food, an expensive object, something your dog picks up on a walk, another dog, or even a child.

### STAGE 1: LEARNING THE CUE

**STEP 1:** Place small treats into both your hands. Keep one hand/treat hidden behind your back while you present the other treat to your puppy then close it into a fist they can still reach.

**STEP 2:** Your dog may try smelling, nibbling, or pawing at your hand and while your puppy is sniffing say your cue word, "leave it", "ignore", "away". Wait until they hesitate or move away, even slightly, by moving their nose away from the fist. Then, quickly praise and reward with the food in your other hand.



**STEP 3:** Repeat step 2 several times until your dog leaves the treat alone the instant you give your 'leave it' cue word. Then switch which hand presents the treat. Repeat the exercise until your dog gets it right every time.

### STAGE 2: CHANGING THE PRESENTATION

**STEP 1:** Start with 2 different treats and pick the treat which your puppy likes more (higher value) to hide in your hand behind your back. Present the second (lower value) treat to your puppy on the floor then cup your hand around it so they can't reach it.

**STEP 2:** State your 'leave it' cue and when your puppy lifts or turns their nose away from the cupped hand on the floor – quickly reward with the second, higher value treat you were hiding.

**STEP 3:** Repeat these steps, in short training sessions daily, and be sure to alternate the hands used to present the treats.

### STAGE 3: ADDING DISTANCE

**STEP 1:** Attach a leash to your puppy and state your sit cue. This will provide a barrier to prevent your puppy from getting the object when ignoring your cue, and hence unintentionally being rewarded. Stand a short distance away from your puppy and present a lower value but interesting treat or object just outside of the leash's range.

**STEP 2:** When your puppy gets up to go towards the treat/object, quickly state your 'leave it' cue and when they turn their nose away from the direction of the treat/object reward them with a higher value treat and praise.

**STEP 3:** After, pick up the initial treat/object and reset. Practice this sequence multiple times and vary the novel treat or object presented. When your puppy is consistent you can remove the leash and practice the steps free range!

### STAGE 4: CHALLENGING THE CUE

- Practice now in different environments, with different treats/objects/rewards, and with different distances.
- Try out putting the food on your open palm so that he can see and smell it. Give your cue and when your puppy shifts their nose away, present a higher value reward (toy or treat) that you had hidden in your other hand.
- If your puppy is trying to get the food from the open palm too quickly – make it into a closed fist and place your hand behind you for a few seconds, to reset. This is called a no reward marker and tells your dog that they will not be rewarded for their noncompliance.
- Practice while moving. Leash your dog and walk them past the treat on the floor.

If he reaches for it, calmly state your 'leave it' cue without jerking the leash, then quickly praise and reward your puppy for responding.

If they grab the treat, try your 'drop it' cue – but be sure to not try to physically get it out of their mouth. If he responds to the 'drop it' cue be sure to reward it.

If they are unable to walk past the treat, then move back to the prior stages and work on consistency to build up the 'leave it' cue prior to challenging again.

### Helpful Tips:

1. When practicing 'leave it' cues, it is essential that your puppy never gets the food/object that they have decided to leave during the training. Meaning at the end of a session, do not give them the treats from both hands. This way they will learn the reward now has to come from elsewhere (and look to you).
2. Never physically take the object away from the puppy's mouth while training – it should always be about having the puppy trade up for something better, or being physically prevented from getting the object, thereby preventing negative association.
3. When your puppy has become consistent with both 'drop it' and 'leave it' cues separately you can start incorporating both cues into training sessions but be sure to have some high value treats at the ready!





# Debunking Alpha-Male Dominance Training



The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior, "Position Statement on the Use of Dominance Therapy in Behavior Modification of Animals"  
[AVSAB.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dominance\\_Position\\_Statement-download.pdf](https://AVSAB.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Dominance_Position_Statement-download.pdf)

The Association of Professional Dog Trainers, "Dominance and Dog Training"  
[APDT.com/resource-center/dominance-and-dog-training](https://APDT.com/resource-center/dominance-and-dog-training)

Dr. Sophia Yin, "The Dominance Controversy"  
[DrSophiayin.com/philosophy/dominance](https://DrSophiayin.com/philosophy/dominance)

The Pet Professional Guild, "Position statement on Dominance Therapy in Animal Training"  
[PetProfessionalGuild.com/DominanceTheoryPositionStatement](https://PetProfessionalGuild.com/DominanceTheoryPositionStatement)

LiveScience, "Critics Challenge 'Dog Whisperer' Methods"  
[LiveScience.com/animals/091112-dog-training.html](https://LiveScience.com/animals/091112-dog-training.html)

Time Magazine: "Dog Training and the Myth of Alpha-Male Dominance"  
[Content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2007250,00.html](https://Content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2007250,00.html)

San Francisco SPCA, "What's Wrong with the Prong?"  
[SFSPCA.org/behavior-training/prong](https://SFSPCA.org/behavior-training/prong)

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# Recommended Training Philosophies



**Positive Training – Victoria Stilwell**

[Positively.com/dog-training/positive-training/what-is-positive-training](https://positively.com/dog-training/positive-training/what-is-positive-training)

**Nothing In Life Is Free – San Francisco ASPCA**

[SFSPCA.org/resource/nothing-in-life-is-free](https://sfspca.org/resource/nothing-in-life-is-free)

**Force Free**

[ForceFreeFlorida.com/about-us](https://forcefreeflorida.com/about-us)

**The Pet Professional Guild – Best Practices Philosophies**

[PetProfessionalGuild.com/PPG-Best-Practices](https://petprofessionalguild.com/PPG-Best-Practices)

**Clicker Training**

[FearFreeHappyHomes.com/clicker-training-basics](https://fearfreehappyhomes.com/clicker-training-basics)

[ClickerTraining.com/15tips](https://clickertraining.com/15tips)

**Fear Free Happy Homes**

[FearFreeHappyHomes.com](https://fearfreehappyhomes.com)

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