

MARSAGAN LABRADORS

Training Exercise and Socialization Information Pack



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Training: How and why?

Obedience training is one of the best things you can do for your dog and yourself. It opens up a line of communication between the two of you that is necessary for your dog to understand your instructions.

Nearly all behavioural problems are perfectly normal canine activities that occur at the wrong place or time or are directed at the wrong thing. For example, your dog will defecate on the carpet, bark all night for no reason or chew furniture. The key to preventing dislikeable behaviour is to learn to teach your dog to redirect its natural behaviour in acceptable ways in a domestic setting.

Obedience training is also an easy way to establish a social hierarchy. In obeying to orders, your dog is showing compliance and respect for you.

If you feel like you need help, do not hesitate to enroll your dog in an obedience class to learn the basics. However, it is best to begin training in a familiar area for you dog and with the least amount of distraction possible. Once your dog becomes responsive to commands at home, try them in a different area. Progressively introducing distractions will eventually make your dog responsive in any context. When you choose a word for an order, stick to it. Do not say 'No', 'Stop that' and 'Get off' for the same order as it doesn't make any sense for your dog. Those are three **different** orders.

Keep the obedience training sessions short and always end on a positive note. Try and integrate training into your daily routine, such as when you feed your dog.

Rewards and reprimands while training

It is extremely important to reward your dog every time it responds to an order. You must set up situations repeatedly for it to learn. It is **very** easy to forget to praise your dog's good behaviour as it is less noticeable than bad behaviour. However, you **must** praise **each and every** piece of good behaviour from your dog. If you only punish it when it does something bad and do not remember to praise it every time it listens to you, you will thoroughly confuse your dog. Reprimands are important, but praising for good behaviour is more important still.

Puppy exercise

Your puppy should not do too much exercise as its bones are still developing until around 1 year of age, so do not take it on long walks until it is well over 6 months old. Too much exercise can lead to health problems later on in life such as hip dysplasia. A puppy will get all the exercise it needs playing in the house or garden. When out with your puppy, prefer soft surfaces such as grass rather than hard surfaces such as concrete. This is much better for its developing joints.

Housetraining Tips for your new puppy

Establishing good habits early on is critical. Do not for example let your puppy eliminate in the house at the beginning because you think it is 'young'. When you get your puppy at 8 weeks of age, keep in mind that working border collies are fully trained at 10 weeks of age. At 8 weeks, your puppy is the perfect age to start training. Like children, puppies learn much quicker than adults. However, don't expect your puppy to be perfectly **housetrained** until about 5 months of age.

Puppy Housetraining Don'ts

- Don't leave food out all day and night for your puppy to eat at whim. Have set feeding times, and if the food isn't finished after 15 minutes, take it away. Your puppy will understand this very quickly, and finish the food if it is hungry.
- Don't allow your puppy to eliminate anywhere other than the toilet area.
- Don't give your puppy free unattended run of the house. You are the dominant dog in the house. **You** tell it where it can and cannot go.
- Don't let your puppy get used to lingering around the kitchen when you are preparing food! This will encourage it to become a thief and beg a lot. Say 'No' and 'Get out,' or whatever order you have associated with the dog moving away from you. Point to where you want it to go, and accompany it to the place you want it to go. If it tries to follow you back in, stop, say 'No' firmly and walk on. Repeat this until your puppy stops following you into the kitchen.
- Don't leave shoes, the trash or any valuables lying around the house in reach of your puppy. Leave toys in plain view and reach instead. Keep doors closed.

Puppy Housetraining Do's

- Provide constant access to a toilet area. At the beginning, your puppy will not know what it is for. It will eliminate anywhere and everywhere. Every time you see it eliminating, immediately pick it up by the scruff of the neck (which is what its mother would do if it wanted to carry it, this is **not** painful but a natural way of transporting puppies) and put it down in the toilet area. If you do not catch your puppy but find urine or feces on the floor, take your puppy by the scruff of the neck and bring it to the place where it eliminated. Bring its nose close to whatever it did, repeatedly saying 'No' in a stern voice. Then pick it up again by the scruff of the neck, and put it in the toilet area. Let go of the puppy, and walk away. If your dog has constant access to the outside and you want to teach it to eliminate outside, do the same thing: when you have brought it to the area it eliminated indoors and said 'No' a number of times, put your puppy outside for a couple of minutes.
- Every time you see your puppy eliminating in the toilet area, wait until it finishes and then praise it by saying whatever word you have chosen as **the** praise (remember, you will confuse your dog if you have more than one praise) and stroking it, playing with it, etc. It is not necessary to give a treat every time it eliminates in the right place as this may lead to bad habits.
- When going out, if you are leaving your puppy, it is best to confine it to an area that is covered with papers so that it can only eliminate in an area that looks like the normal toilet area.
- Feed your puppy at regular times.
- Habituate your puppy to sleeping in the same place. Every time your puppy lies down to sleep, coax it to the designated sleeping area and stay with it and stroke it until it settles down and feels comfortable. Using a crate as a designated sleeping area is very useful if you know you will have to put your dog in a crate in its life. Confine it for gradually longer periods of time when you are at home in order to be able to leave it for longer periods alone if necessary in future.
- Provide your puppy with a variety of toys to chew. Puppy teeth change between 4 and 6 months of age and can be very sore so expect a lot of chewing particularly around that age. In adult dogs, chewing is a form of occupational therapy to relieve stress and release energy. If your dog gets anxious if you do not come home, it may start chewing everything in the house. It is pointless to punish this behaviour as it may just make your dog more anxious. You should instead spend time with your puppy playing with its toys, showing it that these are the designated things to chew and repeating the praise for good behaviour as it is playing. Praise your puppy every time you see it playing with its toys by itself. If you catch your puppy chewing on something it shouldn't be, say 'No' and replace the object with one of its toys, using the praise word as soon as it starts playing with the toy.
- Be patient! Getting frustrated and angry will only confuse and scare the puppy.

Training schedule

It is very important that you have **one order for each action**, and that you have a word to end an order. That is to say, when you tell your dog to sit, and praise it for sitting, you need to choose a word like 'OK, its over' or just 'OK' to signal the end of every order. This is of utmost importance especially for orders like 'Stay', 'Heel' and 'Sit'. This is because **as soon as you give an order, the latter must be carried out by both you and the dog until you say the end-word signaling that the order has been carried out to the end.**

1) Training your dog to sit

Step 1: give your dog a treat.

Step 2: say 'Sit' firmly.

Step 3: move a treat above and behind the dog's head to incite it to sit. Some dogs will just lift their head and move backwards. If so, you can give your dog a hint by gently pushing its hind legs to the floor. If the dog gets up immediately, say 'Sit' again and push the dog back into sitting position. Do this, until it can keep the sitting position for a couple of seconds. Give it a treat and praise it. Whilst praising it, it is good to repeat the order 'Sit', such as 'Good sit'. Emphasize the 'Good' when praising the order but softly repeat 'sit' so that the dog associates sitting with 'good'.

Step 4: repeat steps 1 to 3, progressively increasing the time amount of the time the dog stays sitting and immobile before giving it a treat. Progressively replace treats with verbal praises over time. During maintenance training, on average, your dog should receive one food reward every five times it comes obediently.

Step 5: say the end-word and let the dog do what it wants when you are finished

- **Always praise your dog when it responds to the order 'Sit'!**
- **Never, ever say 'Sit' without making sure your dog carries out the order!** Giving an order and forgetting about it will only teach your dog that it doesn't have to listen

2) Training your dog to stay

Step 1: give your dog a treat.

Step 2: say 'Sit'. Give your dog a treat for sitting and praise it verbally.

Step 3: say 'Stay' firmly. Walk backwards slowly. Your dog will probably get up and move around. Say 'No' firmly and put your dog back to its initial position where you told it to 'stay'. Take a couple of steps back, constantly repeating 'Stay'. After a couple of steps, walk back to the dog, praise it verbally with a 'Good stay!' and give it a treat.

Step 4: progressively increase the distance and time your dog stays. Keep repeating 'Stay' but progressively decrease how often you need to say 'Stay' for the dog to stay.

Step 5: Progressively introduce distractions, such as opening the fridge or going into another room when the dog is still on the order 'Stay'.

Step 6: say the end-word and let the dog do what it wants when you are finished.

3) Training your dog to come when called

Step 1: give your dog a treat. Tell it to sit. Praise it and give it a treat for sitting.

Step 2: Tell you dog to stay and slowly move away from it, facing it. Every time it tries to get back, say 'No' and 'Stay'.

Step 3: Say 'Come'. The first few times, this won't mean anything for your dog but if you show it a treat in your hand and say 'Come', it will very quickly associate 'Come' with moving towards you and getting a treat.

Step 4: repeat the first three steps and move a bit further away every time. Having a long lead can help if you are moving too far away to be able to control the dog if it doesn't respond to orders. Repeat steps one to three, and when you say 'Come', gently and briefly pull on the lead to urge the dog closer.

Step 5: practice 'Come' outdoors with more and more distractions, with a lead to make sure you can ensure the dog will come.

Step 6: say the end-word and let the dog do what it wants when you are finished.

- **Always praise the dog for coming!** With time, verbal praising should replace treats but regularly giving your dog a treat ensures that it will still be motivated to carry out the order. During maintenance training, on average, your dog should receive one food reward every five times it comes obediently.
- **Never, ever, ever, ever say 'Come' and do not follow up on the order!!!** Don't say 'Come' and start doing something else, completely forgetting you have given the dog the order. In fact, if you are not willing to follow up on the order (eg. if your dog runs away you know you will not or cannot run after it), it is much better **not** to give the order than to give it and teach the dog that it will not be reprimanded if it doesn't listen. **This is the single biggest mistake people make.**
- **As soon as you give the order 'Come', you must make the dog come.** If you say 'Come' and your dog doesn't come or runs the other way, **do not wait until it comes back to reprimand it.** If you do that, you will teach it not to come. You must instead **catch your dog and reprimand it when it is still trying to run away so that it understands that this is what is being reprimanded.** Having caught and reprimanded your dog, take it by the collar and bring it back to where you first ordered it to 'Come'. Say 'Come' repeatedly as you are bringing it back by the collar. When you get to the initial spot, praise the dog as though it had come by itself. However, you're dog running away when you say 'Come' means that you need to return to basic training at home: steps 1 to 3 in a calm, proximal context.

Training motivators

If this is your first dog, you will quickly learn that it rapidly associates ‘Let’s go for a walk!’, ‘where’s your toy?’, ‘Let’s go in the car’, ‘Food time’ with the actual action. Putting your shoes on, jingling car keys and opening a can of dog food all make your dog very happy and excited. To solidify orders such as ‘Sit’ and ‘Come’, it can be good to say them before giving the dog any indication that you are about to take it on a walk. When it has come and you have praised it, **then** you can say ‘let’s go for a walk’ or another pleasant activity.

Distraction training

Don’t let a fun activity such as running free and playing with other dogs become a distraction to training. Instead, use it as a reward. Show the dog that if it comes when called, it will receive plentiful praise, a treat and then be allowed to resume its play after you have given the end-order. Try to be a part of your dog’s good times, so that it learns that you do not equal the end of play.

It is good to practice all the orders you teach your dog regularly if you want to maintain a good level of obedience and prevent bad habits.

Separation Anxiety (Owner-Absent Misbehaviour)

Some dogs experience separation anxiety when left alone. They may whine, bark, cry, howl, chew, dig, scratch at the door or soil the house. Without knowing it, we often train our dog to express this behaviour: if our dog barks as we are leaving, we quickly come back and give it attention to ‘reassure’ it but the dog sees this as praise for barking, whining, etc.

Long drawn-out farewells can create separation anxiety problems by first exciting your dog and then making the isolation more obvious once you’re gone. Avoid working your dog up before you leave the house.

To prevent separation anxiety, dogs need to feel happy, secure and comfortable when you’re away. **Provide your dog with toys to chew**, maybe even a toy with a treat hidden inside it that will take time to figure out. Like people, dogs need to be kept occupied. If possible, you may want to leave your dog outside, as there is more to do there. A **canine companion** can also significantly help with boredom while you are away. Remember, **boredom is often mistaken for separation anxiety**.

Socialization

Socialization is the process of getting your dog accustomed to different people, objects, animals and situations. It is good practice to let your dog familiarize itself with new things in a non-demanding situation. Allow your dog to approach, investigate and even retreat if it wants to, at its own pace. **Many people make the mistake of trying to sooth their dog when it acts frightened, but your dog may take this as a reward for its fearful behaviour.** Socialization is very important, as fearful anxious dogs may growl or even bite other dogs and people. Unsocialized dogs have trouble adapting to new situations and are a nightmare to take to the vet. It is easiest to socialize your dog when it is 3 months old or under. The older it gets the more tedious it will be to get it used to novel situations.

Make sure that each of the following experiences are pleasant and non-threatening for your dog. Avoid frightening and painful situations as this may cause a phobia which is very difficult to deal with. It's better to go too slow and assure that your dog is comfortable than rush things and create unnecessary fears. Also take into account that dogs are like people, they all have different personalities and some are more social than others.

Socialization Do's

- Invite friends to meet your dog and encourage your puppy to play with them
- Bring your dog to parks, playgrounds, and other places with lots of people and plenty of activity. Start with a lead.
- Take your dog on short, frequent rides in the car. Again, some dogs, like people, are carsick and nothing can be done about it (veterinarians can prescribe anti-vomiting tablets if you are going on a long trip). **Never reprimand your dog for vomiting in the car, it is not its fault and it would much rather not do it!**
- Introduce your puppy to different sounds. Loud noises should be introduced at a distance and gradually brought closer.
- Be kind to your vet and accustom your puppy to being put on a table, brushed, bathed, inspected, having its nails clipped, its mouth opened, its ears cleaned, its paws picked up, etc.

Socialization Don'ts

- Don't put your puppy on the ground where unknown animals have access until it is vaccinated.
- Don't let your dog socialize with animals that appear sick or that you don't know.
- Do not reward fearful behaviour. Let your dog get used to things by acting calm yourself.
- Do not allow experiences to be harmful, painful or excessively frightening.
- Do not rush your puppy.
- Do not overdo it. Young puppies need a lot of sleep and tire quickly. Older dogs may panic if they take in too much at the same time. Take things slowly and calmly.