

Teaching Your Dog to Settle

We've all been there! Your dog is running around in circles like the Tasmanian Devil and nothing you do or say seems to make a difference. Many times dogs that are uncontrollable or unruly in the house are crated or end up being "put outside." Unfortunately, this doesn't solve the problem, it only postpones their excitement until they're free from the crate, or brought inside the house again. Dogs are social animals, they thrive on social interaction and are usually their happiest when they are included in the daily activities of their "people." Consistently isolating your dog in a crate or in your yard (or doing so for prolonged periods) may lead to a socially starved dog. This isolation can make your dog so overwhelmed when he receives attention or is brought into the house that the same unruly behavior intensifies; thus a vicious circle begins.

One of the most important commands that you can teach your dog is a "Settle" command. It can be taught, learned, and reliably performed at a very young age. It can save your dog from being isolated in a backyard, specific room, or crate and it can help you enjoy your dog, have control of him, and help establish leadership. The Settle command can even be taught before "sit" and will contribute to the bonding of you and your dog.

This command is most easily taught at a very young age, but even old dogs can learn new tricks! So start teaching your puppy or dog the "Settle" command today. If you have a puppy, you may start teaching him as young as 8-10 weeks. Lie your pup on his back gently; if he squirms, try to gently keep him on his back until he relaxes. If he REALLY squirms, and tries to bite, then lie him on his side. Puppies that exhibit biting or nipping behavior when being placed on their backs may grow up to be very dominant dogs. If your puppy exhibits this behavior, it is your responsibility to educate yourself on the special needs and considerations that a dominant dog requires.

Generally, a dominant pup will squirm a lot and maybe try to nip or bite, "mouthing" on your hands as you're restraining him. A submissive dog may squirm a little, but will usually relax quickly and will look away from you. Avoiding eye contact is a submissive gesture, so do not try to make your puppy look at you. In fact it is best if he looks away, this reinforces the pack hierarchy that establishes you as "leader."

While you are gently holding your puppy on his back or side, say "Settle" in a gentle, firm, and pleasant manner. Don't be lovey-dovey with him (even though he'll look so cute). This is teaching a command, not love-play. At the same time, don't scare him into settling by screaming the command. When he squirms, tighten your hold (gently but firmly) and say "Settle" until he relaxes. When he relaxes, say "Good" and loosen your hold. Each time he squirms, tighten your grip and repeat "Settle." Then repeat "Settle" when he relaxes. If you have long hair or floppy sleeves, make sure you are not *tickling* your dog, and thus making him squirm! Try for 20 seconds of a continuous settle. This may be impossible for the first few times, so 3-5 seconds of a continuous settle is perfectly acceptable, then release him with LOADS of praise. (The praise part is VERY IMPORTANT EVERY TIME.)

Do this 3 times a day at times when *he will most likely comply*. Don't "test" the command for a few weeks or months, until you are sure he knows and thoroughly understands it, and you can handle him. Some puppies and dogs respond quite well to being gently restrained, others are as squirmy as a wet worm! The easiest way to combat the squirmy dog is to practice this command when he is already resting. You want to make it as easy as possible, when teaching a new command, for your dog to "Do Good." If you have a particularly hyper dog that never seems to *be* resting you will need to be physically and mentally prepared for your first attempt! It is important that the first time you attempt the "Settle" command that you are able to, at the very least, gently restrain your dog. If you start teaching him the "Settle" command by saying "Settle" and then allowing your dog to squirm his way out of it, you are essentially teaching him a great new fun game! If you have a wiggle-worm dog that seems to be void of a spine and feels like he's got an extra pair of paws, you will need to be ready for his antics!

If you are teaching an *adult dog* the "Settle" command, the same technique applies but you need to be aware of your dog's personality before attempting the command. If your dog is known to be very dominant and/or aggressive, or if you feel there is any possibility that your dog may try to bite you, *do not* attempt the "Settle" command, but get professional advice from a reputable animal behaviorist. If your adult dog will perform a "Down" command for you, you should be able to teach him a "settle" command quite easily. After "downing" your dog, lie him completely on his side and say "Settle." Don't let him raise his head or squirm; keep him on his side for 3-20 consecutive seconds with no motion. When you release him, PRAISE, PRAISE, PRAISE!!! If you can not "down" your dog, you can begin to teach the "Settle" command at times that your dog is already lying quietly and is relaxed.

You can condition your pup or dog as he begins to learn this command, to execute it in whatever manner you deem necessary. For instance, if you say "Settle", do you want your dog to lie down and roll over on his back? Maybe so, but a more practical use is to basically calm down, lie down, or lie still. [My dogs](#) do all three. If they're running around being too rowdy in the wrong place or time and I say "settle" they stop whatever they're doing, sometimes they lie down. They know that it is a "non-release" command, meaning they can play quietly again if they wish (albeit, sometimes escalating to another "Settle" command). Also, if they are in a new place pacing about, I can say "Settle" and they will lie down and stop their pacing.

Unexpectedly, I found this command worked well for shy dogs or dogs that are scared. Saying "It's OK" to a scared dog is actually praising him for being scared and makes matters worse. By using the Settle command, I've been able to stop some scared dogs from shaking; they're still scared, but less neurotic about it! Lastly, the settle command is wonderful at the vet's. My dog, [Waya](#), was able to get x-rays without anesthesia because we used the "settle" command for him to lie still on the table and allow his limbs to be positioned. You can accomplish this by holding your pup in a cradle position, giving the "Settle" command, and slowly tipping the dog so that his head is lower than his backside. (This is also a "trust building" exercise). Don't over-do it the first couple of times, you want him to be successful at his "Settle." Another way to do this is

to lie him on the bed and slowly slide him onto the floor (with you supporting him of course) giving him the "Settle" command. Of course, before you even attempt these trust-building exercises you need to have enough confidence in yourself first. This means that first you need to know you have the strength to hold your dog, and you'll also need to portray confidence, not laugh, and sometimes hold the pup tight enough so that he "knows he better settle." On these "intensive settles" it is best to give a release command. I differentiate the non-release and release by this: If I say Settle and don't physically touch my dog, he knows not to wait for a release command. If I say Settle and physically touch him in some way--to position him, to clip his toes, or whatever--then he is to stay "settled" until I give a release command.

Every time you clip his toenails, look in his ears, or do anything that requires him to stay still, use Settle.

Source: www.doggiedoor.com