

SUCCESSFUL STAYS

Essential Elements for Success

✓ **Comfort and Safety**

Don't ask your dog to stay in environments or situations where he is not 100% happy, or in a position or on a surface that is uncomfortable. In addition, never rely on Stay to keep your dog safe or out of trouble. It should never replace a fence, a leash, or a closed door. Even the best dog will break a stay given the right (or wrong) circumstances.

✓ **Ask for "Something" Rather than "Nothing"**

Instead of asking your dog to nothing, ask him to do something. In these classes, we use a box to teach Stay because asking the dog to "be in the box" is a much more understandable concept for him than "do nothing".

✓ **Define the Finish**

Stick to your side of the bargain. You must tell the dog when Stay begins, and – even more importantly – when it has finished. Otherwise the dog will have to make that decision for himself, and he will either just get up when he's had enough regardless of your requirements, or become anxious because he doesn't know if he can move yet or not.

The Stay Sequence

- 1) The owner asks the dog to take up a particular position.
- 2) The owner gives the dog the Stay cue, and a hand signal if desired.
- 3) The owner moves away.
- 4) The owner returns to the dog.
- 5) The owner releases the dog with "okay" to let him know the Stay exercise is finished.
- 6) The owner rewards the dog.

Remembering all this this takes practice! To ensure you are fluent with this sequence *before* trying to train your dog, practice on your own.

Training Stay

With the above in mind, the process of training a Stay cue is as follows:

- 1) Position** Cue your dog to get into his box. Don't ask him to assume any particular position – you are training "stay", not sit or down, so don't complicate things. If your dog changes position while in the box, it doesn't matter.
- 2) Cue** Give your dog the "Stay" cue. What word you use doesn't matter as long it will always mean "stay there until I give you a release cue", and nothing else. Many people also give a hand-out signal. This is often helpful to the dog, who is better at body language than the English language.
- 3) Wait** Do not move away. Wait one second, no more. Do not repeat your stay cue, continue to hold out your hand, or talk to your dog. If you continue to provide that information, your dog will think he only has to stay as long as the cue is being repeated or the hand signal is present. The Stay is a time when all contact and interaction is suspended, by necessity, so he needs to learn that right from the beginning, and be fine with it.
- 4) Release** After one second, give your dog the release word, "okay". *This is the most essential part.* This tells the dog the stay is over and he can move. It also tells him that you will let him know when he is done, so he doesn't need to decide that for himself.
- 5) Reward** Immediately give the dog his reward (also an essential part!). Give one reward while he is in the box. This reinforces that being in the box is the best place to be, and also keeps him settled and controlled after the "okay" release. Then straight away drop a second treat outside the box for him to go after. This helps him to understand that "okay" means he can move. These two rewards need to be delivered very close together, without a delay in between.

6) Next Steps After building duration, distance, and distraction (see below) to the point where your dog is confident with a short stay, you can start working on Stay without the box. Remember to reduce duration, distance, and distraction right down at first. Now you can ask the dog to sit or down, and remain in that position until released. You may not mind if your dog changes position as long as he stays in the right place, but if there is a chance you may go on to Competitive Obedience or Rally-O, you will need him to hold the position as well, as this is hard to fix later. A sit stay is not a comfortable position, so keep these really short, no more than one minute. Dogs with poor core strength, or with back or hind leg issues, will struggle with a long sit stay. For long stays, use a down for comfort.

Adding Duration, Distance, and Distractions

➤ Building Duration

Always build the length of time the dog can stay for, before starting to introduce distance. Build duration very slowly, one second at a time, so that your dog will barely notice the increased time and will remain confident. Anytime your dog looks anxious, starts to whine or bark, becomes restless, or even breaks his stay (ie moves from where you left him), you have left him too long. Never test your dog to see how long it takes for him to move, or try to show off in front of other people – that is unkind and unfair, and will ruin his stay.

➤ Building Distance

Once your dog can stay comfortably for 30 seconds, you can start to introduce distance. To do this, you must cut right down on the duration, so that you are not adding too much stress to the mix. Start by taking one step away, and step straight back to release your dog. Don't always step in the same direction - you want to be able to move to any point around him, not just straight out in front. Gradually build up distance until you are able to walk ten steps away and walk straight back. Once you have a solid stay with that, you can start combining duration and distance – take one step and wait two seconds, then three steps and wait two seconds, two steps and wait five seconds, and so on. Every time one is longer or further, the other must be shorter and closer. Never attempt more distance or duration than you are confident your dog can manage.

Never call your dog to you when finishing a stay. It is very important that your dog understands the routine of Stay, and that includes the fact that you *always* come back to him and reward him in the place where you left him.

➤ Building Distraction

Just as with duration and distance, when you start adding distractions, you need to reduce the other two right back to the beginning. Start with minor distractions, and build up slowly. Never train with distractions that your dog finds scary or upsetting. You need to desensitise him to these before you even consider using them as part of Stay training.

Troubleshooting

Always remember that if your dog fails to Stay, it is YOUR fault. If your dog is not succeeding, consider the following:

- Are you being consistent in the sequence of cues and actions described above?
- Are you *always* releasing him after a stay with “okay”?
- Have you asked too much in terms of duration, distance, or distraction?
- Is something scaring him? Is he uncomfortable? Is he sore?
- Are you allowing him to move before you release him (even if only by a nano-second) but still rewarding him?
- Are you rewarding him *before* releasing him with “okay”, rather than after?
- Are you rewarding in the position you left him in, or allowing him to move and step forward to get the treat?
- Are you encouraging him to break by calling him to you instead of returning to him?