Overview

This adaptation is inspired by the first several days of Dr. Karen Overall’s Protocol for Relaxation (RP) included in her book Clinical Behavioral Medicine For Small Animals, published January 15, 1997, and available online at Amazon. Any flaws in this protocol are my own.

Dr. Overall’s full 15-day protocol is also posted as a resource on a number of websites, including: http://joyfuldogllc.com/training-resources/. Her original protocol includes the human moving around and away from the dog with increasing intensity.

This particular adaptation includes movement toward the dog to help your dog be more comfortable with people entering his or her space. These steps can be modified further to your particular situation or goal, with the caveat that the distance between steps be tiny, and that harder steps be interspersed with easier steps.

Each session has a list of simple tasks to perform. You can do this exercise with your dog on a mat, in a crate, or anywhere you can both have some quiet, focused time. Don’t feel that you have to complete all the steps in a single day’s session. This is just a guideline.

Proceed calmly and methodically. Use a low, calm, tone of voice, mark the desired behavior with a quiet “good” or similar verbal, and treat with a low to medium value treat. (Higher value treats may be too exciting for relaxation.)

This is not an obedience exercise. The goal is to create a calm state of relaxation for you and your dog such that s/he is unconcerned when things happen that don’t directly concern him or her. If s/he should get up and move away during a step, quietly guide him or her back to the training location, and resume at an earlier, easier, stage in the exercise. If a step continues to be too hard, ask for something easier instead. Think of dividing the space between an easy and a hard step into little tiny steps. Don’t correct a “failure”, rather adjust your steps to help your dog practice succeeding.

Start by asking your dog to sit. If s/he offers you a down instead of sitting, this is fine. If s/he starts in a sit and shifts to a down part-way through the protocol this is a sign of increased relaxation—a good thing! If your dog can’t sit at first, work with what s/he can do.
The Steps

I’ll annotate the first few steps to help guide you in this exercise.

Day 1: Dog’s Task

Sit for 5 seconds
   Ask your dog to “stay” in a quiet voice.
   Quietly count to five.
   When you reach five seconds if s/he is still in a “sit” or “down” mark and treat.
   Move on to the next item.

   If s/he is not still in a sit or down, gently return her to the training location and ask for a “sit”.
   If it is helpful, quietly ask for a “stay” a few times during this step.
   Shorten the step if necessary.

Sit for 10 seconds
   Assuming s/he hasn’t stood up, ask for a “stay” and start counting softly to 10. You can give her
   another “stay” in the middle or as often as is needed.
   When you reach 10 seconds and s/he is still in a sit or a down, mark and treat.

Sit while you take 1 step back and return
   Ask for a “stay”, then calmly take 1 step back.
   When you complete your step and return, and s/he is still in a sit or a down, mark and treat. If
   this is too hard, mark when you have stepped away, then return to deliver the treat.
   If s/he stands up or breaks her sit or down, return to her and calmly ask for a sit. Mark and treat
   her sitting and start over a step or two earlier in the protocol. Be sure to give her some extra
   “stays” this time to help her be successful.

   As your dog becomes more fluent and relaxed with the exercise and the steps you will begin to
   speak less during each step. If you think your dog is about to get up, though, help him or her
   with a quiet “stay” cue.

Sit while you take 2 steps back and return
   Sit for 10 seconds
   Sit while you take 1 step to the right and return
   Sit while you take 1 step to the left and return
   Sit for 10 seconds
   Sit while you lean forward slightly and straighten up
   Sit while you lean forward slightly and hold for 1 second, then straighten up
   Sit for 15 seconds
   Sit while you take 2 steps to the left and return
   Sit while you clap your hands softly once
   Sit while you lean forward for 1 second, then straighten up
   Sit while you count out loud to 10
   Sit while you clap your hands softly once
   Sit while you count out loud to 20
   Sit while you take 1 step to the right and slightly forward, and return
   Sit while you clap your hands softly twice
   Sit for 3 seconds
   Sit for 5 seconds
Sit while you take 1 step to the left and slightly forward, and return
Sit for 3 seconds
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 5 seconds
Sit for 3 seconds

Day 2: Dog's Task

Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you take 1 step back and return
Sit while you take 3 steps back and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you lean slightly forward and return
Sit while you bend your knees slightly forward and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you take 3 steps to the right and clap your hands
Sit while you take 3 steps to the left and clap your hands
Sit for 5 seconds
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you walk one fourth of the way around the dog to the right
Sit while you take 4 steps back
Sit while you walk one fourth of the way around the dog to the left
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you take 5 steps back from the dog, clapping your hands, and return
Sit while you walk halfway around the dog to the right and return
Sit while you walk halfway around the dog to the left and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you jog quietly in place for 3 seconds
Sit while you jog quietly in place for 5 seconds
Sit while you jog quietly in place for 10 seconds
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you jog one fourth of the way around the dog to the right and return
Sit while you jog one fourth of the way around the dog to the left and return
Sit for 5 seconds
Sit for 10 seconds

Day 3: Dog's Task

Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 15 seconds
Sit while you lean forward and return
Sit while you step forward and to the right and return
Sit while you walk halfway around the dog to the right, crouch briefly, and return
Sit while you walk halfway around the dog to the left, crouch briefly, and return
Sit while you take 10 steps backward and return
Sit for 15 seconds
Sit while you take 10 steps to the left and return
Sit while you take 10 steps to the right and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit while you walk halfway around the dog to the right, clapping your hands, and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit while you walk halfway around the dog to the left, clapping your hands, and return

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Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you jog 10 steps to the right and return
Sit while you jog 10 steps to the left and return
Sit while you begin to crouch in place and return
Sit for 15 seconds
Sit while you begin to crouch, holding the partial crouch for a second, and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you jog backward 5 steps and return
Sit while you jog to the right 5 steps and return
Sit while you jog to the left 5 steps and return
Sit for 5 seconds while you clap your hands
Sit for 10 seconds while you clap your hands
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 5 seconds

Day 4: Dog's Task

Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you jog backward 5 steps and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit while you jog halfway around the dog to the right, step in slightly toward the dog, and return
Sit while you jog halfway around the dog to the left, step in slightly toward the dog, and return
Sit while you move three fourths of the way around the dog to the right and return
Sit while you move three fourths of the way around the dog to the left and return
Sit while you jog backward 5 steps, clapping your hands, and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you clap your hands for 20 seconds
Sit while you move quickly backward 10 steps and return
Sit while you move quickly 15 steps backward and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit while you jog halfway around the dog to the right, crouch briefly, and return
Sit while you jog halfway around the dog to the left, crouch briefly, and return
Sit while you walk quickly 15 steps to the left and return
Sit while you walk quickly 15 steps to the right and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit while you move three fourths of the way around the dog to the right and return
Sit while you move three fourths of the way around the dog to the left and return
Sit while you walk all the way around the dog
Sit while you step to the right, kneel on the floor, and return
Sit while you step to the left, kneel on the floor, and return
Sit while you walk around the dog, quietly clapping your hands, and then return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit while you jog quickly around the dog
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit for 10 seconds while you clap your hands

Day 5: Dog's Task

Sit for 5 seconds
Sit for 15 seconds
Sit while you walk quickly 15 steps to the right and return
Sit while you walk quickly 15 steps to the left and return
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the right, crouch for 2 seconds, and return
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the left, crouch for 2 seconds, and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit while you walk around the dog, clapping your hands
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you walk quickly backward, clapping your hands, and return
Sit while you walk quickly backward, clapping your hands, return and lean forward, and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you step to the right, kneel on the floor, and return
Sit while you step to the left, kneel on the floor, and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you walk quickly backward, clapping your hands, and return
Sit while you step to the right, kneel on the floor, lean a little toward the dog, and return
Sit while you step to the left, kneel on the floor, lean a little toward the dog, and return
Sit for 10 seconds while you lean forward
Sit while you step back five steps and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit for 15 seconds while you clap your hands
Sit for 10 seconds while you jog in place
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you kneel down and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 15 seconds while you kneel down
Sit for 10 seconds while you remain kneeling
Sit for 5 seconds while you remain kneeling
Sit while you stand back up

Day 6: Dog's Task

Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 20 seconds while you jog back and forth in front of the dog
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 15 seconds while you kneel down
Sit for 10 seconds while you remain kneeling and lean forward a little bit
Sit for 5 seconds while you remain kneeling
Sit while you stand back up
Sit for 20 seconds while jogging
Sit while you walk around the dog
Sit while you walk around the dog, clapping your hands
Sit for 15 seconds
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit for 30 seconds
Sit while you walk quickly backward, clapping your hands, and return
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the left and kneel down
Sit while you remain kneeling and lean toward the dog a little bit
Sit while you remain kneeling and reach toward the dog a little bit
Sit for 30 seconds while you get back up
Sit while you walk quickly back to the front of the dog, clapping your hands, and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the right and kneel down
Sit while you remain kneeling and lean toward the dog a little bit
Sit while you remain kneeling and reach toward the dog a little bit
Sit for 30 seconds while you get back up
Sit while you walk quickly back to the front of the dog, clapping your hands, and return
Sit for 20 seconds
Sit for 10 seconds while you clap your hands
Sit for 5 seconds

**Day 7: Dog's Task**

Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 20 seconds while you clap your hands
Sit while you take 10 steps backward and return
Sit while you walk around the dog
Sit for 15 seconds while you kneel down
Sit for 10 seconds while you remain kneeling and lean over the dog a little bit and straighten up
Sit for 5 seconds while you remain kneeling
Sit while you stand back up
Sit for 30 seconds
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the right, lean toward the dog, and return
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the left, lean toward the dog, and return
Sit while you lean forward and return
Sit for 30 seconds
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the right, lean and reach toward the dog, and return
Sit while you walk a third of the way around the dog to the left, lean and reach toward the dog, and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 15 seconds
Sit for 5 seconds while you clap your hands
Sit while you jog in place for 10 seconds
Sit while you jog three fourths of the way to the right and return
Sit while you jog three fourths of the way to the left and return
Sit while you take 10 steps backward and return
Sit while you walk around the dog
Sit for 30 seconds
Sit while you lean forward for 3 seconds and return
Sit for 10 seconds
Sit for 5 seconds

*That’s a week of exercises. Well done! As your dog becomes more relaxed with this work you can begin to spread out your treats such that you mark and treat after two steps, then three, then one, then two, then one, then three, etc.*