



Teaching a Stay

When it comes to “stay”, most folks ask for too much too soon, so their dogs practice breaking the stay, rather than keeping it. Also, many handlers will keep repeating the cue, while holding up their hands like a traffic cop, and walking backwards.

In the past I have done all those things, and more! However, I now want a dog who will stay on a single cue, and I want to be able to turn my back and walk away, knowing that once I’ve done that I will find that my dog is still in the place where I left him.

Note that if your dog follows you as you move away after you have asked for a stay, it’s not actually a bad behavior. It’s just not the one you asked for. I love a dog who will follow his handler’s movement and body language. Famous trainers give expensive week-long workshops on getting this behavior! We just want our dogs to also understand what “stay” or “wait” means.

As you begin to introduce “stay”, keep in mind that we want to work in your dog’s “Success Zone”, so we’ll ask for the behavior in tiny, easy, increments:

- Ask for a stable behavior that your dog can do with one cue. Let’s use “sit” for this example.
- When your dog is sitting, say “stay”.
- Immediately click and treat.
- If he’s still sitting, say “stay” again.
- Without moving, count to three in your head.
- Click and treat.
- Re-cue the “stay”, and bend one knee.
- Click and treat.
- Re-cue the “stay”, and take a single step to your right.
- Step back to your original position.
- Click and treat.
- Etc...

You’ve started by asking your dog to stay for very tiny amounts of time, and with really limited movement on your part. Some dogs are so keyed into our body language that bending a single knee gets them going! Others seem not even to notice.

We initially train this behavior in a position where we're facing the dog. For many dogs, breaking eye contact raises the difficulty level of a "stay" enormously. Take a break after 5-10 repetitions of "stay" as above, and when you come back to it, perhaps later in the day, work on breaking eye contact:

- Ask for a stable behavior that your dog can do with one cue. Let's use "sit" for this example.
- When your dog is sitting, say "stay".
- Immediately click and treat.
- If he's still sitting, say "stay" again.
- Without moving, count to three in your head.
- Click and treat.
- Look to your left and immediately look back at your dog.
- Click and treat.
- Look to your left, count to 2 in your head (maybe only to 1!), and look back at your dog.
- Click and treat.
- Look to your right and immediately look back at your dog. (Some dogs find your looking to one side harder than looking to the other!)
- Click and treat.
- Look to your right, count to 2 in your head, and look back at your dog.
- Click and treat.
- Etc.

Once you begin to get some traction, every now and again throw in a very easy step in the middle of the harder steps.

Keep your training sessions short, just a few minutes here and there a couple of times a day.