

# Daily Activities for You and Your Dog

By Sherry Woodard

If you want a well-trained, well-mannered, well-socialized dog, interact multiple times every day with your dog, with the goal of building a foundation of trust and a healthy relationship. (See “Why We Use Relationship-Based Training.”)

All dogs benefit from learning and practicing skills daily. Keep all interaction fun; if you are stressed on a particular day and will not play nicely with your dog, skip spending time with your dog that day. Dogs are sensitive to your emotional state and will pick up on your stress.

## Things to Teach and Practice Daily

**House-training.** I add the words “Go potty” right away. I set each dog up for success by walking him or her outside about every 45 minutes on lead to allow the dog many opportunities to get it right. I supervise the dog inside the house because it’s much easier and faster to help her learn where to go potty before she starts having “accidents” in the house.

**Name recognition.** Use the dog’s name often when you’re praising and playing with her, and always with a happy tone. Dogs should have only positive associations with their names and nicknames.

**Recall.** Call the dog to you often – again, always using a happy tone. Add treats sometimes to pleasantly surprise her and keep her coming to you fast. Remember to practice recall frequently, not just when something fun is about to end. People often lose great recall because they only call the dog for negative reasons or use a negative tone. Why would any dog want to come running to you if you seem angry or if the fun almost always ends when she runs to you?

**The joy of touch.** Teach your dog to enjoy being touched on all body parts. Start with getting your dog to enjoy your touch and work toward the goal of getting him comfortable with being touched by people he doesn’t know. It is important that dogs allow us to touch them because they may need to be handled by various people: strangers, rescuers after an emergency, the vet, the groomer. They may need to be picked up off the ground or floor for grooming or medical reasons. If you can lift the dog’s body up off the floor, practice this to help him relax and realize that nothing bad happens when he is lifted.

Can you trim your dog’s nails? Is he comfortable having his feet touched? Grooming has



many benefits for dogs, so teach your dog to enjoy grooming. Make sure that anyone who grooms your dog is kind and gentle to help ensure that you have a dog who is safe for others to handle. You can help him to feel more relaxed by adding positive experiences to his grooming memories.

When I have a new dog in my home, I massage the dog every day, touching his entire body and continuing to touch him until he relaxes. Many dogs are so excited and reactive to our touch that this is a challenge. To help the dog learn to relax and enjoy touch, I do the massage in a quiet room without a lot of human or non-human traffic. If your dog does not allow touch, please read “Teaching Your Dog the Joys of Touch.”

**Rest and relaxation.** Dogs don't know how to control their own energy and the result can be destructive, nuisance or rough behaviors. There are dogs who bark incessantly, chew up everything within reach, dogs who mount, pull humans around by the limbs or hair, knock down children, and decapitate Barbie! People must teach their dogs to have an “off” switch. Many dogs are dropped off at shelters because their people became frustrated and felt they could no longer control their dogs.



Every day, you can help your dog by teaching her how to rest and relax in your home and during outings. Going on walks or riding in a vehicle should be relaxing for both human and dog. When I have a new dog in my home, I practice R&R daily by having the dog either tethered to me or crated for a while. I tether new dogs or crate them for travel; I do not allow them to jump around barking while I drive.

They also enjoy walking on lead without pulling. How? Because they are taught to walk without pulling: I simply stop walking until they ease up on pulling. Going for walks is much more enjoyable if the dog isn't yanking you along. Also, any dog will be more welcome in public settings if she has manners. Her energy will be more focused and calm if she is not in emotional overdrive while out walking.

**Retrieve.** The retrieving game is not for every dog; those who enjoy it will let you know. I start with a toy tied on a lunge whip. Drag the toy around excitedly and the dog will probably chase it. If he does, this can be the game for a while. Then I start throwing one toy tied with a thin line a short distance and have another toy in my hand. If the dog goes to the thrown toy, I guide her back with the line and show her that I have another toy.

The two-toy method helps many dogs learn to interact instead of just taking a toy and going off to play with it. The dog also learns to trade the toy in his mouth for the toy you have in your hand, which is more fun because you can keep that toy moving to entice him to continue to play with you. I add words for trading toys – “trade,” “drop it” or “give” are common words used.

**Tug.** I teach dogs to tug. The game of tug, with rules, is a very healthy, educational game. You start and end the game, and if the dog ever puts her teeth on your skin, the

game is over. I use an emotional tone to say “Ouch!” if I feel teeth on my skin. This helps dogs learn to play within limits. Self-limiting behavior is normal for dogs: Watch well-socialized adult dogs play with puppies or senior dogs. They sense what is appropriate and play accordingly. Again, you can use two toys to help the dog learn to drop the one she is holding, signaling the end of one game and the start of another.

**Search.** Keep them thinking! I hide food, treats and favorite toys to encourage my dogs to search daily. When a dog finds these hidden treasures, I reward him with lots of praise.

**Agility.** Many dogs enjoy agility training and benefit from the experiences that come with doing something physical. In agility training, dogs learn how to really use their bodies – and all four feet. Fearful dogs learn to be more confident, overweight dogs get some great exercise, but just about any dog can benefit from learning to negotiate his way over, under, through and around objects. Agility training can be fun for your dog – and for you, too. Remember to check with your veterinarian before beginning any weight loss or exercise program with your dog.

## Getting the Behavior You Want

Be proactive by teaching your dog to perform the behavior you want! We can reward any behavior we like and want to see more of, including being calm and gentle. The most effective way to squelch unwanted behavior is to ignore it. Why? Because giving any attention (even negative forms of attention, such as saying “no!”) for unwanted behavior is still seen by the dog as a good thing because he’s getting attention. You can immediately ask for another wanted behavior while ignoring what the dog has offered.

**Hand-feeding.** Taking treats gently from all human hands is a valuable lesson and, of course, dogs love practicing it. Hand-feeding a dog is a great way to raise the value, in his mind, of interaction with all people. This simple human behavior builds trust in fearful or shy dogs. For all social dogs, we can hand-feed while practicing all known cues.

**Lure training and capturing.** These are primary ways to train easily and quickly. In lure training, I guide the dog with a treat or toy – the lure – into a sit, down, stand, or up (jumping or climbing up on something). You can use lure training to teach a dog to use his paws to touch an object. For example, in my house I have a bell on the door to the yard. I show new dogs that the bell ringing causes the human to open the door. I teach dogs to ring the bell to go outside, which is helpful once a new dog has been house-trained.

I use capturing to reward any behavior I like, such as sneezing. You can capture any behavior and cause the dog to repeat it by assigning a word to the behavior and rewarding the dog whenever she does the behavior. I give it a word right away and use the word every time they do the behavior. Many dogs in my life sneeze as a way to request things they want; I prefer this to barking as a way of asking for things. I do teach “Speak” and give it that word (speak) from the beginning. However, I am careful to only reward “speaking” (barking) when it is wanted. Otherwise, “request barking” can become a problem behavior; if a dog believes that barking will get her what she wants, it can easily be overused by the dog.

**Teaching “wait.”** I teach every dog to wait. I use wait at doors before going in or out, in the car, when I’m giving a dog a bowl of food, if I drop something I do not want the

dog to pick up. The cue I use is a hand signal: palm up, facing out toward the dog. I say “au auat” (a sound more than a word); my tone is firm but not harsh. The dog can be standing, sitting or lying down. If the dog tries to move forward, I physically block him with my hand, trying not to touch him but clearly communicating that he needs to pause briefly.

**Teaching “stay.”** Once a dog has learned to wait, it is easier to teach stay, which is used for longer periods of time than wait, times when you don’t want the dog to move. To start learning to stay, the dog should be in a sit or down position, since standing for long periods can be physically difficult, causing the dog to break position to get more comfortable.

I start very close to the dog and reward often for non-movement. I build up the length of time the dog stays still before I start to move away. When I start to move during the stay, I take baby steps around the dog, not away from him. Many dogs want desperately to be near us, so go slow when teaching stay. If we cause a fear reaction, it is much more difficult for the dog to learn. Just like us, dogs learn best when they are enjoying the learning experience and aren’t stressed, emotional or distracted.

**Teaching social skills with other animals.** Most of us want to take our dogs out in public. Going places, of course, means that our dogs meet a variety of people and other animals, and they get to practice their social skills. Please protect your dog by not letting her have negative experiences. One way to help dogs learn to have more socially acceptable behavior is to have people meet you with their dog-friendly dogs to allow the dogs to have positive experiences. If your dog is not social, please read “Managing a Dog with Behavior Challenges.” Some dogs require more management than others, but with our help they can go out safely and enjoy a bigger life than the house and yard offers.

**Providing medical and dental care.** All dogs need regular medical and dental care. They need a family doctor just like us – one we trust to oversee their general health. Routine visits allow your doctor to see changes through examinations, blood tests and x-rays. Different parts of the country have different parasites, for example; your veterinarian will be able to keep your dog safe in your area. Please report any change in behavior to your family veterinarian. Often, changes in behavior are related to changes in the dog’s physical health.

*Sherry Woodard is the animal behavior and training consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends’ No More Homeless Pets mission.*