



Laurie Luck, CPDT  
Certified Pet Dog Trainer  
Box 1111  
Mount Airy, MD 21791-1111  
(240) 848-3468  
laurie@SmartDogUniversity.com

## WHAT IS SELF CONTROL?

**You've probably seen it yourself: the dog who barks incessantly until he gets what he wants. Or the dog who wants to greet visitors so badly that he forgets there's someone on the other end of his leash and pulls the person down the street (or through the mud puddles) to get where he wants to go.** You may think it's lovely that your puppy loves visitors so much that he runs and jumps on them to say Hello, but the reality of the situation is that you have a dog that exhibits rude behavior and lacks self control.

By not teaching your dog self control, you're limiting his freedom and enjoyment.

Self control is sometimes thought an inherent quality – either a dog has it or doesn't. But it's more than just behaving calmly or resisting the urge to just *do*. It is also more than just a well-trained dog. Self control is an emotional skill and can be taught and developed just as physical skills such as loose leash walking.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Neglecting to teach this skill to our dogs does them an enormous disservice. **By not teaching our dogs this crucial skill, we actually limit their freedom in public.** Dogs that cannot control themselves are bothersome to people and dogs alike. A dog that drags you down the road because "he's just so friendly" or barks at you for attention isn't cute, and the behavior shouldn't be glossed over with "he's so friendly he just can't control himself." **Dogs deserve more credit – they are smart enough to learn self-control if we are patient and consistent enough to teach them.**

Don't know if your dog has self-control issues? **Describe your dog's questionable behavior as if he were a person.** Now that it's phrased in "people terms" does it seem unreasonable? If you'd be shocked that a person would do it, then your dog could probably sharpen his self-control skills.

For example, do you **have to** play with your dog when he brings you a toy? Would you think it a bit strange if a parent got up from the dinner table because Johnny wanted to go play baseball at that moment?

Does your dog go bonkers at the sight of other dogs because he's so friendly and wants to play? And he drags you across the yard to get to the other dogs? Now rephrase that: Your ten-year-old sees her friend with her family and dashes across the street without looking (you in tow) because she just **has to** say Hello?

**It's never too late to teach your dog this skill, so don't despair, even if you've got an older dog.** The longer the dog has practiced the behavior, however, the longer it will take to teach self-control. But self control is so important that it's worth taking the time to teach it!



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## SELF CONTROL PROGRAM

### Exercise – Physical and Mental.

*Physical Exercise.* **One of the most important pieces of the Program is exercise.** Often, simply adding vigorous exercise (at least twice daily) to your dog's routine is enough – their lack of self-control may really be lack of exercise. A twice daily walk isn't enough for most dogs. Neither is putting your dog in the backyard for 15 minutes. For your dog to benefit from exercise, you'll need to schedule a minimum of two exercise sessions that produce "tongue-hang" – the kind of exercise that makes your dog's tongue hang out of the side of his mouth. My 5-year old yellow Labrador, Tango, loves to chase the tennis ball. At least three times a day, we head out to the backyard with the Chuckit®. I know I've worn him out when he brings the ball back, but finds a cool spot to rest! (In the winter, the exercise sessions are much longer than in the summer, as the outside temperature naturally makes a difference in his endurance level.)

#### Self Control Program:

- Exercise
- Management
- Training

### Don't have a fenced backyard? Try these ideas:

- ✓ Find a dog-friend who does. Even if you have to drive 15-20 minutes, a tired dog is worth it!
- ✓ Enroll your dog in daycare 2 – 3 days per week.
- ✓ Hire a pet-sitter to exercise your dog while you're at work.
- ✓ Find an active neighbor who wants a jogging partner
- ✓ Play hide-and-seek indoors with your dog.
- ✓ Throw a toy or ball up the stairs and have your dog retrieve it again and again.
- ✓ Play tug of war or fetch indoors.

Note: Before starting your dog on any strenuous exercise program, check with your vet first!

*Mental Exercise.* **Often, encouraging your dog to engage his brain can be as tiring as exercise. Using both mental and physical exercise not only helps decrease his energy level (and improves his self control), it also makes your dog's life more exciting and fun.** Instead of feeding your dog from his bowl, try stuffing one of his meals in several Kongs™. If your dog is an un-stuffing genius, add some non-fat yogurt and then freeze the Kongs for an extra challenge. There are a number of food-related toys on the market – find one that works for your dog and then use it! Get that food bowl off the floor and let your dog work for his dinner using one of those toys!

**Management.** In addition to physical and mental exercise, you can make changes to your dog's environment (read: your house) that will help decrease his inappropriate behavior. There are a couple of ways to use management to your advantage. First, remove the opportunity for your dog to get into trouble. Does your dog like getting in the garbage and then running off with his new-found treasure? (1) Put a dog-proof lid on the trash can or put the trash can in the pantry. (2) Don't chase the dog or otherwise reinforce the



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behavior of getting in the trash. Instead, find a favorite dog toy or treat and show your dog the goodie. Then *trade* the dog (treat for trash) and immediately follow #1.

**Another way to manage your dog's behavior is through the use of crates, gates, leashes, and tethers.** If you simply *cannot* move the trash can to another area or put a lid on it, use a gate or crate to keep the dog out of the kitchen when you can't monitor him. Gates and crates are not just for puppies – make use of them to help keep your dog out of a situation that could land him in trouble and you in frustration!

*Training.* The more training your dog has, the easier it is to communicate with him. Training is also a form of mental stimulation that helps tire your dog out. **Teaching your dog is also a terrific way to strengthen the bond you have with your dog which, in turn, enhances all interactions you have together.**

### **How To Teach Self Control**

*Get a clicker. If you don't have a clicker, get one.* Self control exercises require that you have an instant mode of communication to your dog – a way to tell him he's doing something right and will earn a goodie. Generally, we click the dog for the tiniest sliver of self control – which may be just that four feet are on the floor at once. But that might happen for only one second. You need the click to instantly signal the dog that four on the floor is *perfect* and he has just earned a goodie.

*Set realistic goals. Don't expect long periods of calm behavior* – gradually build up one second at a time. If your dog likes to jump on people, click when his feet are on the floor – *before* he has a chance to jump up (again). The click is fast enough to mark the instant your dog's paws hit the floor.

*The light-bulb moment. You want the dog to learn that he controls the click.* His behavior can make you click. It's powerful stuff to watch a dog figure out that what he does actually affects his environment. Every time you click, you must pay a reward (tiny yummy treats usually work best – about the size of a pea). Once your dog gets this concept, the rate of learning increases dramatically.

### **What to Teach**

**A good first lesson to teach your dog is that looking at you is a good thing. Another good lesson for your dog is that sitting is the way to say "please."** Before you do anything for your dog (petting, feeding, playing, going on a walk, etc.) request that they sit first. Not until they sit do they get to go outside, or get attention, or get dinner, or whatever it is that they want. Sitting is an easy task for a dog, and it's not asking too much of them to "say please" in this manner for something that they like.

### **Teach Sit Calmly**

All dogs know how to sit. The skill we want to teach our dogs is how to sit *when we ask them* and also *in the face of distractions*.



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Teach your dog to sit in a quiet, low-distraction environment. An ideal location would be a quiet room that doesn't face the street or have much indoor foot traffic. If you live in an apartment, townhouse, or condo, try teaching during a quiet part of the day when sounds from outside (or upstairs) won't get in the way of learning.

**Give your dog the cue to sit only once.** If your dog sits, click and treat. Reward mightily and reward often! **A good trainer is a generous trainer.** Give your dog lots of opportunities to "get it right" and earn reinforcements for sitting. If your dog doesn't sit, *don't repeat the cue*. Simply turn away from your dog for two or three seconds. Turn back around and give the cue again and click and treat the instant your dog sits. If your dog still doesn't sit, you want to take your training back a step – your dog doesn't really understand what "sit" means. Go back to the beginning and lure your dog into a sit using a tiny treat. Continue this until the dog is following your hand easily into the sit position.

**Go slowly.** Don't increase the distractions too quickly. You might need to curtail some of your regular activities temporarily until your dog catches on and can perform in public with distractions.

#### Teach Go To Your Mat

Use a portable kennel pad or even a bath mat to teach this. Have some really tasty treats on hand, and of course, your clicker. **Toss the mat on the floor in front of you (between you and the dog, ideally) and click the instant your dog looks at or takes a step toward the mat.** After you click, toss the treat *away from the mat*. The reason for this? You want the dog to have lots of chances to step on the mat and earn a click (and treat). If you deliver the treat on the mat, the dog won't move off the mat and consequently doesn't get another chance to earn that click and treat for returning to the mat.

Important Note: **When you're done practicing, pick the mat up off the floor.** Don't put it back down again until you're ready to work with your dog. If the mat is always on the floor, there's a good chance the dog will not be reinforced every time he goes to the mat and the "power of the mat" is significantly diminished. The mat is down only when you're able to provide instant feedback (and rewards) when the dog steps onto the mat.

**Once your dog is deliberately moving onto the mat, you can add the cue.** Pick one word that you'll use (suggestions: mat, place, home, bed, spot, etc.) to tell your dog to go to the mat. *When the dog is moving toward the mat (not before)*, say your word and then click and treat when your dog gets to the mat. Avoid saying the word multiple times ("Fido, mat. Mat. Mat. Fido, mat). Just once is all you need – any more will only distract the dog and the relationship between the word and the action will be diluted.

**Now that you've added the cue, you can begin to stand further away from the mat or even change the direction you face.** What you want to see is the dog going to the *mat*, no matter where you're standing. We want to teach the dog that it's the *mat* that matters, not us.



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**To build duration on the mat, deliver a frozen Kong™ to the dog when he gets to his mat.** The frozen Kong™ gives the dog something to do and occupies his time, so that he'll stay on the mat longer. When you're eating dinner and you'd like the dog to be away from the table, ask him to go to his mat and then give him a Kong™. Voila – dinner in peace!

**To build distractions, you'll want to decrease your distance from the mat (in other words, move closer to the mat when you're teaching this).** Raise one arm above your head and give your dog the cue to go to his mat. Your goal is to “change the picture” enough that the dog notices, but not so much that the dog is completely distracted. You're introducing small, but noticeable differences in the situation so your dog can learn to work with distractions. As your dog gets used to the minor distractions, start increasing them slightly. How do you know if the distraction is too large? If the dog can't get it right more than two times in a row, scale back the distraction; make it easier for the dog to get it right.

**Eventually, you can transfer the cue – for instance, the doorbell ringing could be the cue for the dog to go to his mat.** First, if the doorbell alone sends your dog into a frenzy, you'll need to desensitize him to the doorbell ringing. Here's how:

Have a friend outside your door. Have extra-yummy treats ready near the door. Have your friend ring the doorbell. **The instant the doorbell rings, you'll put that tasty treat directly in front of your dog's face – touching his nose with it if that's what it takes to get his attention.** (The friend stays outside, not coming in.) Once you have your dog's attention, click and treat him if he's quiet for half a second. Then click and treat again, and again, and again as long as he's quiet. You want **lots of clicks and treats** here. As many as possible in ten seconds (as long as the dog is quiet). After your dog has calmed down, have your friend ring the bell again and repeat the above. In just a few three to five minute sessions, your dog's frenzied behavior should be significantly decreased because he now pairs the sound of the doorbell with the delivery of treats.

The next step is an easy one. Have your friend help out again. Have him ring the doorbell and before you deliver the treat, say the cue word for going to the mat. In this step, **you're going to toss the treat onto the mat to help the dog get this right.** Once your dog is on the mat, click and treat him again (and again and again for ten seconds, so long as he's quiet and stays on the mat). Work on this until your dog recognizes the doorbell as the cue to go to his mat.

## **QUICK SOLUTIONS**

**If your dog barks at you to get your attention, simply turn away.** Walk into another room if you have to. If your dog follows you and barks at you, go into another room and close the door. Don't talk to him, look at him, or give him any attention until he stops barking.

**If your dog brings a toy and thrusts it into your lap to get you to play, ignore these attempts.** Stand up and go into another room if you need to. If he follows you with the toy,



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simply take the toy away and put it up. If he goes to find another one, take that one away, as well.

**If your dog pulls to get to another person or dog, keep your hands close to your body (so the leash is consistently the same length) and stand as still as a tree.** No conversation, no yanking on the leash, just be quiet and still. When you get some slack in the leash or when your dog turns to look at you, THEN say “good boy” and continue to move forward. If your dog doesn’t turn around at all, turn around and move away from the person or dog.

**Once you have taught your dog self-control, you’ll look back and wonder how you ever got along without it! It’s that powerful – it will change the interactions you have with your dog in a positive way. Your dog will be afforded more freedom to go out in public, which is more fun for the both of you!**

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**Check out the *Smart Dog Blog*:** <http://smartdog.typepad.com>. Updated several times a week with good-to-know doggie information and tips.

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## ABOUT LAURIE LUCK

I'm Laurie Luck, founder of Smart Dog University, and I've been helping dogs and their owners since 1994. **I choose to work with dog lovers because I understand how frustrating it can be to have a dog that you'd like to spend time with, but don't know how to get your dog to listen.**

Smart Dog University, LLC represents over a decade of learning - specializing in how to teach dogs and their people how to work together. I love what I do and have developed many happy friendships, both canine and human, along the way.

## Education and Qualifications

With a **Master's degree in Psychology from George Mason University**, I have a solid understanding of how learning occurs. That knowledge helps me teach people how to teach their dogs. The end result is a dog-human team that work well together.



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I am a full and contributing member of the dog training community and can introduce my clients to the professional and ethical standards, and to the vast network of contacts and resources available through my professional membership status.

### Things I'm Doing

- I am the only **Certified Karen Pryor Training Partner** in the tri-states.
- I am a professional member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), as well as a **Certified Pet Dog Trainer (CPDT)**.
- I am **Vice President of the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers (CCPDT)**, an international testing and certification program for professional pet dog trainers. CCPDT's certification program is based on humane training practices and the latest scientific knowledge related to dog training. Competence and continued growth in training practices is promoted through the recertification of qualified professionals.
- I raise and train service dogs for **Service Dogs of Virginia**, a Charlottesville, Virginia based non-profit organization dedicated to providing service dogs to assist people with disabilities. Their goal is to help individuals in wheelchairs or with mobility impairment become more independent.
- I am an AKC-Approved **Canine Good Citizen evaluator** and am qualified to judge the Canine Good Citizen test.
- I attend national dog behavior conferences annually, as well as local and national dog training and behavior seminars, workshops and classes so that my clients benefit from cutting edge tools and research.

