



## **TEACHING CALM BEHAVIOR**

### ***IF THEIR NOT CALM THEY CAN'T THINK, IF THEY CAN'T THINK THEY CAN'T LEARN***

The most important training exercise is to teach a dog to settle or relax.

The goal is to train the dog to achieve physical and mental relaxation on command. A calming or settling command should be chosen (e.g., STEADY, EASY, etc), the goal is to teach the dog relax and then to focus on you.

This is intended to calm the dog that is overly anxious, aroused, excitable, or fearful in or out of the home. Once the dog has learned to settle, the command can be used to help achieve a calm response during a wide variety of behavior problems. It can be used to get the dog to focus when it might be overly excited or anxious in greeting family members, strangers, or other animals. It can also be used with dogs that become anxious as the owners prepare to depart.

Training a dog to settle and focus should begin in an environment where your dog is calm and there are minimal or no distractions. The sequence for training is to give a 'settle' command (or other suitable word), get the desired response and then give immediate reinforcement (reward).

Food, affection, or a favored toy can all serve as rewards (use what your dog likes the most) if they are consistently given immediately following the behavior. Later, food or toys can be given on an intermittent schedule and slowly phased out.

### **Calming exercises for any location**

1. While you are standing or sitting still, give the dog full length of the leash. If the dog is calm and the leash remains loose, give the dog a food reward and say 'steady.'
2. If the dog starts to become anxious or aroused the 'steady' command is given. And if the dog relaxes wait 3 seconds and reward calm behavior, this ensures you are rewarding the desired behavior and not arousal.
  - After several repetitions, the dog learns that it is rewarded for keeping calm and the leash loose.
  - If the dog does not calm then the environment is still too arousing, so stop and do the exercise again later in a less stimulating place.
  - Practice a couple of times a day in the home with few distractions as the dog gets better you can then gradually add distractions and start working outside.
  - This can also be used to stop tugging and pulling on the leash while walking.

At no time should verbal or physical correction be used, especially with anxious or fearful dogs as this can turn a dog's fear into phobias. Take your time and it will happen.

**Remember: If their not calm they can't think; If they can't think they can't learn.**

**Mick McAuliffe.**