

# Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

## Golden Rule Training

### Teaching your dog to Settle

Teaching your dog to go to a designated spot, like his bed or a mat, and stay until released can be useful. For example, when eating dinner, watching a movie with family, or greeting guests at the front door. This process is gradual and will take some time, so patience is a must.

### Teach Your Dog to Go to a Spot

#### Step 1: Follow the Treat

First, you will need to teach your dog that her mat or bed is a great place to be; it has to be a good experience and not punishment.

Prepare some bite-sized treats before you begin training and use something exciting, like soft dog treats, small pieces of hot dog, chicken or cheese. The more your dog loves the training treats, the harder she will work to earn them.

1. Call your dog over to the bed or mat that you would like to use. Standing just a foot or two in front of the mat, say the cue, "Go to your spot", "Go to bed" or any other phrase that works for you and your family (the cue must be consistent for anyone instructing her).
2. Hold a treat in front of your dog's nose so she sees that you have something delicious, and then toss the treat onto the mat.
3. Your dog will step onto the mat to eat her treat. Say "Good girl"! Even one paw on the mat earns a treat!
4. Use your release word, such as "Okay", "Free", to signal her that she is released, and can now move off the mat. You can also clap your hands and walk a few steps away to encourage your dog to move off the mat. *Your release word should be the same one you use for all other training cues and must be consistent within your family.*
5. Repeat this sequence, tossing the treat to guide your dog onto the mat from various angles. Eventually, your dog will start to seem reluctant to move away from her mat.
6. At this point, when your dog starts to stay on the mat, you can move on to the next step. Continue the steps no more than five times within a session.

*If she is having trouble, try a better treat and give her several for going to her mat. Sometimes more encouragement is all that is needed; dogs learn at a different rate, some dogs will need several training sessions to get to this point and others will understand what you want after only 15 to 20 repetitions.*

#### Step 2: Follow the Hand

Instead of tossing a treat to guide your dog onto the mat, you will introduce a hand signal.

Start with Step 1 a few times to warm up.

Then follow these steps:

1. Put a treat in one hand and hide it behind your back.
2. Then standing a couple of feet away from the mat, you say, "Go to your spot", or another cue you have decided to use.
3. With your empty hand, point to the mat. Your movement should look a lot like the one you made in Step 1 when tossing a treat to the mat. In response to your pretend toss, your dog should turn her head and look toward the mat. When she turns her head, take the hidden treat from behind your back and toss it onto the mat.

*This will convince your dog that she will still get a treat when she goes to the mat, even if she does not see you toss it when you gave your hand signal.*

4. Persuade your dog to move off the mat so you can keep practicing. Repeat the sequence above 15 to 20 times within a session.
5. Eventually, your dog will go all the way to her mat when you give the hand signal. As soon as all four of her paws are on the mat, say "Good Girl!" Then, instead of tossing the treat, walk over to the mat and feed your dog the treat from your hand.
6. Repeat Step 2 for a few days, using your new hand signal to guide your dog onto the mat from various angles (if you tend to be in front of the dog every time you give a cue, they may not understand what you want). When your dog readily moves onto the mat as soon as you give the hand signal, you can move on to the next step.

### **Step 3: Go the Distance**

To teach your dog to go to her mat from a distance, follow the guidelines below:

Continue to practice Step 2 for a few more days, gradually increasing the distance your dog must travel to get to her mat. In the beginning, stand just two feet away from the mat then add a few inches at a time when practicing.

1. Say, "Go to your spot" or "go lie down" etc.
2. Point toward the mat as you did in Step 2.
3. Wait silently for your dog to move onto her mat, and when she does, say "Good Girl!" and give her a treat (always use an up-beat happy tone of voice).

Practice this sequence until your dog quickly goes to her mat as soon as you say the cue and point. Next, try standing 3 feet away from the mat, and when she understands and responds, then continue to increase the distance. If she does not respond, shorten the distance. When you can stand 10 to 12 feet away and send your dog to the mat, proceed to the next stage, teaching her to stay there.

### **Teach Your Dog to Settle and Stay in Her Spot**

Now that your dog knows how to go to her mat, you can teach her to stay there. Before

you start this stage of training, your dog will need to learn the "Down" and "Down-Stay" cues. (For help teaching your dog these basic cues please see our articles on teaching your dog "Down and Down-Stay.")

Once she understands "Down and Down-Stay", you are ready to train the "Settle and Stay" cues. Start by taking your dog's mat and put it next to a comfortable chair or sofa where you can relax and read or watch TV while your dog learns to stay in her spot.

### **Step 1: Stay on the Mat**

1. Say, "Go to your spot," and point to the mat.
2. When your dog moves onto the mat, praise her enthusiastically and ask her to lie down; then say, "Stay" and count to 10 silently, then "Good Girl!", and give your dog a treat.
3. After your dog has finished her reward, release her with "Okay" (or your release cue) to let her know her job is done. Encourage her to move off the mat by clapping, taking a few steps away or by tossing a treat away from the mat. Then start again from the beginning.
4. Repeat the sequence above for a number of days, gradually increasing the time that you ask your dog to remain settled on her mat. (If your dog already knows the "Stay" cue, you will progress quickly.)

As you increase the duration, randomly throw in some easy repetitions; for example, start with 10 seconds, and then increase to 15 seconds. Try 20 seconds, and then go back to 10 to "proof" the cue. Continue to increase to 25 seconds, then 30, then 40, and then an easy 10 again. While your dog is staying on her mat, reward her randomly with a favorite treat. At first, be generous and reward every 10 seconds and once she gets the hang of it, you can gradually reduce the number of treats you give while your dog stays in her spot.

If your dog gets up before you release her, gently take her by the collar and lead her back to her mat. Ask her to lie down and stay, but do not give her a treat. (If you do, she might learn that the way to get another treat is to break her stay). Have your dog stay on the mat for at least 15 seconds. Then reward and release her. If she is getting up a lot, you are progressing too quickly and she needs some shorter, easier repetitions for a while so she understands what you want her to do.

When you build up to about three minutes on the mat, you can start giving your dog something to keep her busy and happy while she stays in her spot for longer periods of time. After you send your dog to her mat and ask her to stay, hand her a tasty new rawhide, pig ear or bully stick or stuff a KONG® toy with something delicious and let her focus on the toy. While your dog enjoys her goodie, you can sit down right next to her and read or watch TV. When her time on the mat is up, release her with "Okay," and then take away the chew or KONG. (She only gets her special treat when she is in her spot, which makes is a good activity!)

When you have worked up to 5 to 10 minutes of mat time, you can proceed to Step 2.

### **Step 2: Add Distance**

After your dog learns to settle down in her spot for a while, you can teach her to stay in place while you move away from her. Again, go slowly moving a few inches at a time to make her successful. Say, "Go to your spot," and point to the mat.

When your dog moves onto the mat, praise her and ask her to lie down. Then say, "Stay"

and move a few steps away from the mat. If your dog stays, say "Good Girl!" Then quickly return to the mat and give her a treat; after your dog has finished eating her treat, say, "Okay" to release her from the stay.

Encourage your dog to come off the mat by clapping or moving a few steps away. Then you can start again from the beginning and keep practicing.

Repeat the process above for a few days, and gradually increase the distance from your dog while she stays on her mat. Start with 2 steps, and then increase to 3, then 4 steps. Then add an easy repetition and only move one-step away and gradually increase.

*Because you are making the exercise harder by adding distance, only require your dog to stay for a shorter period; try 15 seconds. When you work on adding distance make the duration shorter; this helps her understand what you want her to do; once she understands the distance, increase the duration. You want to make her successful every step of the way!*

When you are able to walk about 15 steps away from your dog while she stays on her mat, you can move on to Step Three.

### **Step 3: Putting Duration and Distance Together**

Now that you have worked on both increasing the time your dog stays on her mat and the distance you move away, you can try putting those two things together.

Repeat Step 1: Stay on the Mat, but this time, try moving away from your dog when you ask her to stay on her spot for longer periods. When you are ready to train, put your dog's mat six to eight feet away from your comfortable chair or the sofa. After you say, "Go to your mat" and ask your dog to lie down and stay, hand her a stuffed KONG or something tasty to chew. Then move to your spot and relax for five minutes or so. When the time is up, release your dog with "Okay," and then take away the chew or KONG.

Practice this step for a few days. Gradually increase both the distance and time your dog is stays on his mat. Use easy, short repetitions so that your dog does not get bored or frustrated.

### **Step 4: Add Distractions**

So far you have been practicing in calm, quiet places with little to no distraction. The next step is to get her to stay with some distraction to the scenario. Practice in a variety of locations and situations. When your dog can stay on her mat with distractions around, you will be able to start using this skill in real life situations.

Set your dog up to succeed by increasing distraction slowly. First, practice in various quiet places, like all the rooms in your house. Then try slightly more distracting places and situations. You can practice in your house when family members are moving around, when you are cooking in the kitchen and when you are eating dinner at the table. Try practicing at friends' houses, too.

When your dog can reliably stay in her designated spot in these distracting places, add even more distractions. A good distraction is a guest rings the doorbell. You can reward your dog by releasing her to greet the visitors instead of treats. Try practicing while someone bounces a ball or squeaks your dog's favorite toy nearby. If she stays, you can release her and reward her with a quick game a favorite treat or something else she finds rewarding.

If your dog cannot stay on her mat when you move to a new location to train, you may have progressed too quickly. Go back to a slightly less distracting location to practice for a while or asking her to stay for a shorter period. After a few successful sessions, you can try making things a little harder again. Remember to be patient and she will get it!

## Training Tips

- Set your dog up for success by training when she is exercised and calm, especially for a younger dog. It is also a good idea to hold training sessions when your dog is hungry so that she is extra-motivated to earn her treats, chew or KONG. Try feeding her half of her food so she is still interested in the treats she gets during training.
- When your dog is in her spot, resist the urge to repeat, "Stay." Its fine to say it one time to remind your dog that you would like her to settle down once she gets to the mat, once should be enough. If you repeat the cue, you will always repeat if before she complies, your goal is for her to respond with saying the cue once!
- Remember to use the release word "Okay" to tell your dog when she can get up. You do not want her to think she can release herself.
- If your dog stands up, turns around, sits or flops over on her side, this is acceptable, as she may need to readjust to be comfortable on her mat. However, if she gets up and steps off her mat, immediately say "Oops!" or "Eh-EH" and rush over to lead her back to her spot. When she is standing on her mat again, ask her to lie down and remind her to stay. After 30 seconds or so, give her a treat to let her know that you love it when she stays put in her spot.
- During the training process, you can use a leash or tether attached to a heavy piece of furniture to remind your dog to stay in her spot. After securing the tether to the furniture, say, "Go to your spot." Then ask your dog to lie down and stay. When she is in position, attach the tether to her collar. After your dog's time on the mat is up, unhook the tether and say "Okay" to release her.

Source:

ASPCA, Teaching your dog to settle

About.com [http://dogs.about.com/od/basiccommands/a/goto\\_place.htm](http://dogs.about.com/od/basiccommands/a/goto_place.htm)