

Relax on a Mat

Teaching your dog to relax on a mat is a great way to teach your dog to turn off and calm down. When your dog has learned to relax on his mat you can take the mat anywhere you go where you need your dog to lay down and be quiet such as a just outside the kitchen while you are preparing food, a veterinarian's waiting area, or to a dog friendly patio for lunch.

What it Means

Relax on a mat means that you when you present your dog's mat, in any location, he will be drawn like a magnet to lay on the mat and will be relaxed. In the beginning, training will take place in quiet place with no distractions. Over time, locations can be changed and distractions can be added so you can build up your dog's reliability in all kinds of places.

Before You Begin

Before you begin training you will need to purchase a mat that will only be used for your dog's Relax on a Mat training. The type of mat that works best is a carpeted bath mat with a rubber bottom. The carpet helps to reduce bouncing of treats or food when dropped and the rubber bottom reduces any moving of the mat. This mat will be put down only during training sessions and picked up and put away when you are not training your dog.

The best time to do this training is around meal times so that your dog is hungry and you can use your dog's kibble for training rather than filling him full of high calorie treats. If your dog does not eat food/treats in the training session, pick up the mat and try again closer to your dog's next meal time. If you are using your dog's dry dog food for Relax on a Mat training, reduce the amount of food that you put in your dog's bowl so that he is more motivated to eat when you try your training again.

When you are first starting out, keep training sessions short, about 5-10 minutes. As your dog gets used to the training you can increase the amount of time that you spend in a session.

Getting Started

Scatter a few treats/pieces of food on the mat and bring your dog to the area where you will be training.

While your dog is looking at the mat and eating, drop 2-3 pieces of food at a time as long as your dog's head stays down looking at the mat. If your dog looks up at you stop dropping food and wait for your dog to look down again before resuming.

After your dog has learned that looking at the mat is what makes the treats fall onto the mat you can begin dropping food/treats every 3-4 seconds. If during that time your dog looks up at you waiting for the treats then go back to the previous step until your dog keeps his focus on the mat for the entirety of those 3-4 seconds in between food drops.

Next, withhold food for up to 20 seconds to see if your dog will offer any other behaviors such as sit. If your dog does not offer any other behaviors then you can cue "sit" only one time. If at any time your dog sits, drop a jackpot of treats (10-15 treats at one time). Your dog should learn that when he sits on the mat he gets a jackpot and therefore sitting will be more valuable to him than standing. Most dogs do not sit while eating so at this stage your dog will stand up again to eat the jackpot of food. Withhold food again, up to 20 seconds, until your dog sits again.

After 2-4 jackpots in a row you will withhold food again and wait for your dog to look at the mat while sitting before dropping food. When your dog does look at the mat while sitting you will go back to dropping 2-3 treats at a time as long as your dog is sitting and looking at the mat. If at any time your looks at you or stands up you will stop delivering food.

Next, if you have trained correctly, your dog will want to lay down to eat because he is uncomfortable sitting and eating and he has learned that standing stops the flow of treats. When your dog lays down jackpot him again. This time, it should be easier for your dog to continue laying down to eat. As long as your dog continues laying down then continue dropping 2-3 treats/pieces of food at a time as long as he is looking at his mat. If at any time your dog gets up, stop dropping food and wait for your dog to sit or lie down. At this point in the training you do not have to reward, or treat, standing on the mat. Instead, you will only reward/treat your dog if he is sitting or lying down on the mat.

When your dog is laying down as soon as you bring out the mat then you are ready to move your training to another area of your home. When you move to a new location you will likely have to start over from step 1 but your dog should progress through the steps much quicker than he originally did. When your dog is successful in this location, try another location, then another, then another, etc. Add variety by practicing while you are standing, sitting down, moving around, inside the house, outside the house, when friends or family come to visit, at a friend or relative's house, at the pet store, and at the vet's office.