GO TO YOUR MAT

SENDING YOUR PUPPY TO A SAFE PLACE

HOW

First, you will need a mat of some type—a towel will do, or a door mat, or a Mutt Mat, which can be purchased from the Leader Dog gift shop. Place the mat between yourself and the puppy. You will need some treats. Sit your puppy at your left side facing the mat and the wall. Move toward the mat with your puppy, pointing towards it, and when your puppy steps on the mat drop a treat on it. Keep it light and happy and give encouragement. It is important to drop the treat on the mat versus treating from your hand, because your puppy will then focus on your hand and not the mat. If your puppy is following your hand and totally missing the mat, he’s too focused on your hand! Make sure the treat gets dropped to the mat!

As your puppy gets more proficient at heading towards the mat, you can stop and “send” your puppy to the mat. Again, as he steps on it, throw the treat on the mat. The idea is to be able to eventually tell your puppy to find the mat from several feet away. Don’t increase the distance too quickly (we humans often do that) and make sure the treats keep hitting the mat!

The next step is to ask your puppy to step on the mat and lie down. Don’t move on to this step until your puppy seems to grasp the idea to step on the mat himself. Once he steps on the mat, use the treat to guide him into a down. If your puppy will already respond to a verbal command for down, do so and then treat him. Again, let the treat drop onto the mat close enough for your puppy to snag it without getting up will be helpful. As your puppy gets better at this exercise, you should be able to send him away to the mat and ask him to lie down. Keep the treats coming his way! The goal is to have a puppy that will lie down quietly on the mat and wait for further instructions. While it is important to encourage your puppy, don’t be so enthusiastic in your praise that you wind up that “go” button and undo all your training. Remember we want to produce a calm, self-controlled puppy.

WHEN

You can use the mat in many ways to encourage household manners. By adding the reward of a special chew toy (food stuffed KONG or a good Nylabone comes to mind), you can send your puppy to the mat and have him lie down and entertain himself while you eat dinner or answer the doorbell. How about having some quiet time while you watch TV or work on the computer? Training your puppy to use the mat can give you these things.
IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Place the mat against a wall at first. Once your puppy has the hang of the exercise you can move the mat to other places.

2. Approach the mat with your puppy and encourage him to walk on it. When he steps on the mat, throw a treat onto the mat as a reward.

3. Once your puppy gets the hang of it, “send” him to the mat from a foot or two away. Increase distance slowly and always move closer if the puppy gets lost and doesn't understand.

4. Move back closer to the mat and ask your puppy to lie down once he steps on the mat. If your puppy responds to a verbal command, throw the treat near him once he is lying down. If your puppy needs help, use a treat to help your puppy to lie down by “luring” him. This means having the puppy follow the treat with his nose down between his legs and then his body will collapse into a down.

5. Work on being able to “send” your puppy to the mat and have him lie down. Give him a long-lasting reward such as a special bone or a stuffed KONG so he learns that lying still is a good thing.

6. When do you stop the rewards? We will never stop rewarding a dog for good behavior, but we will need to wean puppies off food rewards and onto a variety of rewards of praise, a chew toy, a good belly rub and the occasional treat. You will find that you will not need to use food rewards as heavily with older puppies (over 6 months). As a puppy gets older he will only need occasional treats as the mat should become a good place for him to be. However, be prepared to always reward this type of behavior if it is offered to you (that is, you come into the room and your puppy is lying on the mat looking at you expectantly). Do not ever use the mat as a place of discipline. Your puppy should like his mat and act accordingly.