



Relaxation Protocol (RP) Instructions

Goal- Teach your dog to lie down *calmly* on a mat while distractions are happening. This is a set of practice sessions that start with very easy stays and progress to extremely difficult distractions over 15 levels. Ideally you should work with your dog once a day on this.

Tools- Mat or towel, treats, RP mp3's on your phone. You can download them here, either all zipped together or each individually (if you are downloading directly to your phone, use the individual files – you can download them as you need them):

<http://championofmyheart.com/relaxation-protocol-mp3-files/>

Roadmap- Teach your dog to lie down and stay. Proof the stay by adding distractions. Teach your dog to relax. (Note that the recorded instructions say “Sit.” We will use “Down” instead.

*** While these exercises may look similar to teaching a "down/stay" in obedience class, the intent is *not* the same. In obedience class, the emotional state of the dog is not the primary concern. When training the relaxation exercises, your dog's ability to *relax during distractions* is the primary goal.

Do

- Choose a room in which your dog is already comfortable.
- Use a treat bag with lots of small (pea-sized) soft treats for this exercise.
- Talk in soft tones. Say only what you need to.
- You can say “Stay” for each little sub-stay, or just use a hand signal if your dog knows it.
- When giving rewards, be very calm so as not to get your dog excited during the exercise. A soft “Good girl/boy” works well.
- Separate your other dogs while you are practicing.
- Practice when your dog is *not* stressed.
- Bring the mat out only when you are working on relaxation. Put it away at all other times.

Don't

- Chatter non-stop or use high-pitched exciting sounds.
- Use treats that are too exciting. Your dog may not be able to relax.
- Push, pull down or stand on the leash to get your dog to lie down. That will not make him relax! We always want the dog to do things willingly without force.

Supplies

- Mat - Small enough you can put it away when not in use. Large enough the dog's entire body can fit on it when lying down. Can use a towel.
- Treats - Small (pea-sized), soft and easy to swallow, not too exciting

Instructions

1. Choose a room with which your dog is familiar.
2. Get treats ready in a treat bag or a small container easily within reach.
3. Bring out the mat and place it on the floor in a spot which gives you some room to move around and away from the dog.
4. Stand in front of the mat and direct your dog to the mat and ask him to down and stay.
5. Take a deep breath and start the mp3 file of the level you are on.
6. Calmly follow the instructions on the recording. Your job is to do what it says, and your dog's job is to simply lay there quietly while you give him/her his treats, no matter what you do, or what he sees or hears.
7. Your dog should remain in the down for the entire exercise, which may be different from what he/she has learned in prior stay training. Giving a treat is NOT the end of the stay. You will release the dog when the recording is finished.
8. Reach down smoothly and quickly when delivering a treat, with your hand coming in directly to his/her mouth. Don't make your pup reach up for treats or he/she may get up.
9. Be sure not to hold treats in front of you – your dog should pay attention to you, not the food. I usually take out a few treats at a time and hold them in my left hand behind my back. I take one with my right hand to feed the dog at the end of the sub-stay. I refill my left hand as needed from the treat bag.
10. Don't touch your dog during the session. This will often excite your dog and make him/her more likely to get up. Keep calm and focused, which helps your dog keep calm and focused.
11. At the end of each session, release and praise your dog, pick up the mat and put it away until the next session.
12. If he/she gets up during the session, bring him back to the mat and keep going from that point. Don't stop the recording and start over. Note what went wrong to evaluate what you can do to fix it.

13. Evaluate how you did. Were there any times when your dog got up? Did he/she almost get up? Did something happen (outside noises, someone walks into the room, etc.) that caused the dog to lose focus? If you had a problem with an outside distraction, just try again the next day. If your dog couldn't do one or more of the stays and there was no outside distraction, note what it was and work on it by itself. For example, my dog had a great stay when I started this, but the first time I went to a chair and sat down, she thought we were done (even though she normally waited for a release signal). I had never done that before during a stay, and she assumed we were done. So, I broke that down into a bunch of small steps that she could do – first I went over to the chair and back. Then I went over and touched the chair and went back (treats for staying, of course). Then I moved as if I were going to sit down but quickly rose and went back. Next, I sat down for an instant, then a little longer, etc. until she figured it out. “Oh, each step is the same, just a little bitty bit harder – I get it!” This all took less than 5 minutes, and the next time we did that RP level, she was solid. Always figure out how to make the problem distraction easier and then work to harder. Easier means quieter or for less time or only part of the distraction.
14. Do not move on to the next “Day” until your dog has mastered the current one.

*** NOTE: the mp3's are called DAYS, but each one is actually a LEVEL. You will stay on “Day 1” until your dog can successfully complete it without getting up or becoming excited, then move onto “Day 2” for as long as needed. DO NOT MOVE AHEAD UNTIL YOUR DOG CAN EASILY COMPLETE THE LEVEL YOU ARE ON. This might take one day, and it might take a week or more. The levels are progressive and get more difficult quickly. Ideally, try to practice once a day.

There are circumstances that you will not be able to recreate, an example being “Take 20 steps to the right and return to your dog” followed by “Take 20 steps to the left and return to your dog.” I have never had a house where I could do that, so just walk around the perimeter for the required number of steps and reverse to go back to the dog. Try to do something that approximates the recorded instructions, but don't get upset if you don't have the space or situation. Just do the closest you can.

Once in a while the recording is timed incorrectly for what you need to do. Just keep going as best you can. It really beats reading the instructions while doing the exercises.

Once you have completed all 15 levels, choose a new location and start over. Also, the concepts here can be used for training specific situations that you might have. Use these concepts of starting out super easy and working up to very difficult in other training you might do. It works!

Some people bring the mat to new places and immediately do some stays on it to help their dog relax in a new environment. This works after the completion of many sessions, which conditions your dog to relax as soon as he/she lays down on the mat.