

Stay

When teaching the cue *stay*, it is easiest to train from the *down* or *sit* position. Just like *down* and *sit*, the cue *stay* requires a **release word**. You can use the words “Free dog” or “Okay.” If you are a fan of the movie *Babe*, you can even use the words “That’ll do.” Whichever word or words you choose to release your puppy from a *stay* position is fine as long as you remain **consistent**.

When teaching this cue, first ask your puppy to do *sit* or *down*. Say the word “Stay” verbally, and use the hand signal of an open hand, fingers together in front of his face. Stand up straight, be still, and wait a few seconds. **Mark the behaviour** quietly with a “Yes” or a click from your clicker and then **reward** and **release** him from the cue.

Never offer the mark or reward for staying unless he has not moved. If you put him in a *sit/stay* position, the mark and reward are given only if he is still in the same position he started from. If he breaks the *sit/stay* before you get the chance to mark, reward, and release, do not offer the mark or reward. If he breaks the *sit/stay* after the mark but before the reward, do not offer the reward. When you offer the mark or reward when the puppy has moved before being released, you are rewarding the wrong behaviour. This will only confuse him. You asked for a *sit/stay* so the *sit/stay* is what you mark, reward, and release.

When you begin training the *stay* behaviour, you can gradually increase the length of time before you mark, reward, and release. Start off by asking for a three-second *stay*, and then ask for five seconds, then ten, twenty, and thirty seconds. Each time you ask for the behaviour, remember to mark, reward, and release the *stay* cue.

It is important to keep eye contact with the puppy when training this behaviour. Watch your puppy closely for signs that tell you he is going to break the cue. He may begin to wiggle or adjust his body, a sign that he may be losing interest. Once you see any of these signs, quickly mark, reward, and release him from the *sit/stay* (or *down/stay*). By paying close attention to his body language, you can help him be successful. If you do not see the signs, he may break the behaviour before you have had a chance to mark, reward, and release him.

Once your puppy is staying for 30 seconds in one room of the house, begin to train the *stay* in other rooms until he has learned the cue *stay* in a few different rooms. Now that he can reliably stay for 30 seconds, it is time to lengthen the space between where you are standing and the puppy. Start off asking for the *stay* right in front of him. Once he is in the *stay* position for a few seconds, repeat the word “Stay,” as well as the hand signal; then take a step back away from him. If he is staying quietly after a few seconds, step back into your original position. Give the mark, reward, and release. If he breaks the *stay* cue when you take the step back, simply return to him and put him into the exact same position again. Ask for the *sit/stay* in the same location you did the first time so he can begin to understand that *stay* means to stay exactly where you put him.

Next time you train this behaviour and you get ready to take a step away, make it a very small step. Repeat the *sit/stay* cue verbally and with the hand signal. If he can stay for just a few seconds, step

back into your original position. Mark, reward, and release him. Always give your puppy a chance to [build on his successes](#).

Repeat this exercise many times over many months while gradually extending the distance between you and your puppy. Each time you train the cue *sit/stay*, start off in front of him. As you begin to lengthen your distance, take steps backward. Do not turn your back on him yet. The cue *stay* must be well established before you can turn away from him when you ask for the cue. Right now, he is just learning to deal with the distance between the two of you.

When the puppy can hold the *sit/stay* and you can back away 10 or 20 feet, he is ready for the next step in training this cue, [adding distractions](#). While he is in a *sit/stay* or *down/stay* position and you are across the room from him, repeat the *stay* cue both verbally and with the hand signal. Take a few steps to the right, stop, and face him, repeating the hand and verbal cue. If you notice him twitching, he may be getting concerned and ready to break the cue. Repeat the cue “Stay” as you walk back to where you started. Encourage the *stay* every step of the way, and if necessary repeat the cue “Stay” until you are standing in front of him. Once you are in front of him, quickly mark, reward, and release him. Repeat this exercise many times over many weeks until you can take steps to the right and left and he holds the *sit/stay* or *down/stay* position.

Next, you can make it a little more challenging for the puppy. When he is in a *sit/stay* or a *down/stay*, take a ball and gently roll it across the floor. If you see him squirming and wanting to go get the ball, repeat the cue both verbally and with the hand signal as you walk back to him. Once in front of him, mark and reward with many small treats this time for a job well done, and release him. Once he has been released, let him go get the ball and play together for a few minutes. Repeat the exercise later that day or later during the week until he can be still when he sees the ball roll across the floor.

With all training exercises it is important to remember that [dogs do not generalise well](#). As a result, they must be taught the same cue in many *different locations*, possibly with *different people*, and with many *different distractions* until they can understand *stay* means stay where you are, even if toys, children, and wonderful treats are just a few feet away.

The cue *stay* can be a real challenge for puppies to learn. (Humans, too, can have a challenge with learning to stay still.) [Be patient](#), and take [small steps](#) forward in your training. It is **your** job to help your puppy be successful at learning our language. Whenever training, [always end your training sessions on a positive note](#). If he is having problems staying still, ask him to *sit*, and mark and reward him for the *sit*. For now the training session is over. Short sessions that end on a positive note, sprinkled throughout the day, will achieve wonderful results.



[If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us](#)