

# Training Sessions

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Training sessions should be **short**, lasting only **five to ten minutes**. By keeping the lessons short, you will be able to work with your young puppy's/kitten's **attention span** and fit the training into your hectic schedule. Later, as your puppy/kitten gets older and the animal's attention span increases, you can increase the length of the training sessions. That does not mean, however, that a one-hour puppy or kitten class is not a great idea. In fact, these classes are a wonderful learning experience for both you and your pet.

When you start a training session, it is important to be relaxed and pay attention to your pet. Begin training in a **quiet place** where there are **no distractions**. As the animal becomes successful in learning a new behaviour and all family members can get the pet to perform the desired behaviours on cue, then you can begin adding distractions.

## Distractions

As distractions are added to the training sessions, **reward levels should be increased based on the level of distraction**. For example, suppose you ask your puppy to *stay* and introduce a ball on the floor. At first, just ask your puppy to *stay* for a few seconds, then reward and release him/her from the cue. Instead of a regular treat, this time your pet might get a tiny piece of chicken! Wow, that really makes staying still **worthwhile** because he/she just got a **great reward!**

When training *stay*, gradually increase the length of time you ask the pet to *stay*. Once he/she has learned to *stay* for 60 seconds, you can introduce a distraction. This could be a ball rolling on the floor in front of the pet or an animated toy on the floor nearby. If the pet holds the *stay*, give him/her two, three, or four tiny pieces of meat or fish and then release him/her from the *stay*. This way, as cues become more difficult, the animal is willing to do its best in hopes of receiving that great reward for its efforts.

## Treats

In the beginning, every time your puppy/kitten performs a desired behaviour, reward him/her with a food treat. In order to give the animal a food treat that he/she will consider a reward, you need to **understand what foods your pet likes and is willing to work for**. Different treats will obviously have different values for your animal. Cooked chicken, chicken hot dogs, freeze-dried shrimp, or liver would be a better motivator than normal kibble. **Learn what motivates your pet**. As a general rule, you would use "normal" rewards for normal performance and save the "high value" rewards for higher levels of performance. Mix them up a little from time to time so that your puppy/kitten never quite knows what reward he/she may get.

You can try offering a piece of kibble as a reward if the pet is hungry, there are no distractions, and you are asking for an easy cue such as *sit*. If kibble does not interest your pet, you may want to find another treat he/she is willing to work for. It may also be helpful to schedule your training sessions before mealtime, so you will know the pet is hungry.

Today, there are many healthy treats on the market to choose from. Look for treats that can be broken into many small pieces and that do not crumble on the floor when you break them up. When you drop tiny crumbs on the floor while breaking up the treats, your pet especially will be more interested in Hoovering (playing vacuum) than paying attention to you. Test a variety of treats until you find the ones that motivate your pet. Only use **healthy, low-fat treats** and *never use sweets as a reward* for your puppy/kitten because **many kinds of sweets are poisonous to pets**.

Once your puppy/kitten is capable of performing a particular behaviour on cue, you can start varying the rewards. You may offer one treat when your pet gives you the desired behaviour, and the next time offer two. Or, you may give your pet one treat the first time he/she gives you a requested behaviour and then an ear scratch the second time. Remember to keep the treats out of sight once you are past the luring stage in training a desired behaviour.

## Involving the Family

In order for your puppy/kitten to respond to all family members, everyone should take turns in training. This is a great time to introduce different levels of rewards, meaning treats that your animal places a higher value on. For example, an adult who spends a good amount of time with the pet might get by with just pieces of kibble as rewards. A three-year-old might need more interesting treats such as a small piece of chicken or shrimp to help the animal pay attention, so the child can see positive results from his/her training sessions. At the same time, you want the puppy/kitten to stay focused on the child.

Children should train the puppy/kitten the same way adults do, with short lessons, varying the rewards, and **always ending a session on a positive note**. **Children should never be left unsupervised with a puppy/kitten or even an adult animal**. This is when so many accidents happen. Constant supervision will ensure the safety of both the child and the animal.

## Evolving

As your puppy/kitten's training request becomes more challenging, more interesting rewards should be offered. As time goes on and the pet becomes more proficient at accomplishing his/her tasks, rewards should become more varied and valuable. You can increase or decrease those rewards, depending on the puppy's/kitten's consistency and response time.

Remember to always end a training session on a positive note. If you are asking for a new behaviour from your puppy/kitten and he/she is having a difficult time with it, go back to something your pet understands so you both can be successful before you end your session. Make your training sessions **fun** for both you and your pet. Your pet will learn to look forward to each session, and you can both continue to learn and have great fun in the process.



*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us*

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