

The Value of Patience

Impulse Control Exercises



Have you ever wondered why it sometimes takes a while for your dog to come out in the evening or why staff ask your dog to sit before entering into the play space? Staff perform these exercises to help teach and reinforce the value of ‘Patience’. This practice doesn’t just occur when dogs are coming or going, but all throughout the day. During the day, dogs are asked to sit and wait before the water bowl is placed on the ground, before they go through a doorway or get out of time out, as well as before toys come out. The fancy term for what we are doing is called *impulse control exercises*.

The goal of teaching impulse control is that the dog learns that “good things come to those who wait”. The main benefit is that it helps to curb poor manners (pushing, barking, lunging) that many dogs display when they want something their not getting. This also helps to “tone down” the dogs’ arousal level in potentially exciting situations (going on a walk or entering daycare, for example). It teaches the dog that all things stop, when he acts inappropriately, and nothing happens when he is in a frenzy. If you were hungry, would you knock over your friend and take their candy bar? No, you would politely ask him for a bite. The same idea holds true for your dog. We want to teach them that sitting quietly earns them great rewards. The rewards earned don’t just need to be treats; they can also be life rewards. Life rewards can be something as simple as food, water, petting or even access to the next room. The dog quickly learns that you are the keeper of all things good and that sitting quietly is how he earns everything he wants and needs.

Dogs that benefit the most from this are young dogs or dogs that are extremely gregarious, but benefits can be seen with any dog of any age. Here are some basic commands that can help improve impulse control, when reinforced consistently:

- Wait – Great for any situation where there is something the dog wants to get to.
Examples - In/Out of the car, going out for a walk, coming in to daycare.
- Sit – Great for refocusing attention when your dog gets excited
Examples – Meeting people or dogs, playing fetch, feeding time
- Leave It – Great for preventing your dog from sniffing or eating something bad.
Examples – Dropped food, unidentifiable objects on walks, feces

So when your parents told you that “patience is a virtue”, did you think you would ever say it to your dog?