



GO TO YOUR SPOT

Teaching your dog to go to a designated spot, such as a dog bed or mat, on cue is an extremely valuable skill for daily life. Your dog can learn to rest calmly on their spot while:

- 🦷 You eat meals.
- 🦷 When you answer the door for a delivery or for a visitor.
- 🦷 When you are cooking and want to make sure they are in a safe spot away from the kitchen.
- 🦷 When you want to help them regain their composure any time throughout the day.

Think of the go-to spot as a sort of relaxation station for your dog.

TRAINING PREPARATION TIPS:

1. Choose a spot that is a bit larger than your dog's length and width when lying down.
2. Plan for foundation training just before your dog's mealtime.
3. Use part of your dog's meal and/or treats as rewards.

Step One:

- 🦷 Place the spot right in front of you and place a tiny bit of food in the middle of it.
- 🦷 When your dog steps on the spot to get the food, say your marker word (yes or good) and place another tiny bit of food in the middle of the mat.
- 🦷 Encourage your pup away from and off of the mat and then put another tiny bit of food in the middle of it.
- 🦷 When your dog steps on the spot to get the food, say your marker word (yes or good) and place another tiny bit of food in the middle of the mat.
- 🦷 Repeat a few more times.
- 🦷 Pick up the mat and place it back on the floor just in front of you. Keep your gaze down and towards the mat which will help your pup orient to the mat. Wait for your pup to put one or more feet on the mat and mark and reward with a tiny treat on the mat when they do.
- 🦷 Encourage your pup off of the mat and repeat looking down at the mat in front of you and waiting to mark and reward with the treat on the mat when your pup steps on it.

Step Two:

- ✚ After a few 3-5 minute practice sessions of the above, your pup should start stepping on the mat with consistency when it is right in front of you and you are looking down at it.
- ✚ Progress to placing the mat a few inches away from in front of you.
- ✚ Wait for your pup to step on it and mark and reward on the mat
- ✚ Repeat in a few 3-5 minute sessions.
- ✚ Gradually increase the distance the mat is away from you.

Step Three:

- ✚ Place the mat on the ground a foot or so away from you and mark and reward on the mat when your pup steps on it.
- ✚ When your pup has gone to the mat without much hesitation a few times in a row, delay the saying the marker word for the count of two or three once they are on the mat.
- ✚ This is the foundation of helping your pup learn to stay on the mat.
- ✚ After a couple of 3-5 minute sessions at this stage (delaying the mark for the count of two or three) many pups will start to offer a sit or a down after they step on the mat. Mark and reward when they do.

Step Four:

- ✚ Practice gradually increasing the count from when your pup goes to the mat and when you say the marker word.
- ✚ As your pup stays on the mat for longer, be sure to throw in some very easy wins. So your count might look something like this 3, 1, 4, 2, 6, 2, 8,

Step Five:

- ✚ Practice placing the mat gradually farther away from you.
- ✚ Be sure to keep your gaze on the mat because if your pup is at your side and you make eye contact with them they are likely to stick close by. Orienting your gaze to the mat helps your pup orient to the mat.

When working on this skill the placement of the reward is of utmost importance. Placing the reward on the spot rather than giving it to your dog from your hand helps them make a clear association between the reward and being on the spot.

The marker word (yes or good) let's your pup know what they did at the exact moment they heard it is the correct behavior. The marker word also tells your dog the behavior you wanted is completed. But, you can also add a release word like "okay!" after you mark and reward.

Be sure to add in some jackpot wins when your pup during play training sessions. For this exercises that could mean placing three tiny treats on the mat, one after another, after you say the marker word.

If your pup is consistently not going to the mat or getting off it prior to you marking and rewarding, it may be that you have progressed too quickly and need to take a few steps back to set a more solid foundation of understanding.

Step Six:

- 🦷 When you are confident your pup will go to the mat when you place it on the ground, say your chosen verbal cue (something like “go to your spot!”) right before they do so.
- 🦷 Practice moving your pup away from the mat, saying your cue and looking towards and pointing at the mat.
- 🦷 Mark and reward when they go to the mat on cue!

Step Seven:

- 🦷 At this stage your pup should be reliably responding to your request to hop over to their spot when you send them to it using the verbal cue and by pointing towards and looking at it. Your pup should also be able to stay on the mat for the count of at least five prior to you marking and rewarding on the mat.
- 🦷 During ongoing practice sessions work separately on increasing the count before the mark and reward and on the distance the mat is away from you and your dog prior to sending them to it.
- 🦷 Over time you can also incorporate practice sessions that include adding distractions such as opening a cabinet, placing something on a counter, heading a step or two towards a door (and eventually being able to open it whilst your pup stays on their spot), sitting down, etc.
- 🦷 Remember that while you have done a terrific job of setting a foundation for this skill, reliability around distractions takes a lot of practice over time.

If at any time your pup gets up off the mat prior to you marking and rewarding, simply guide them back to the spot, and wait a moment or two before marking and rewarding. Don't be upset with your pup for mistakes, these are part of the learning process and opportunities for your pup to figure out what works and what doesn't.