



Obedience Training Real Life Integration

What is Obedience?

Obedience training is more than just knowing how to sit, come, stay, down or heel. In fact, it is relatively simple to teach a dog how to sit or come. The difficulty actually lies in training the dog to do it every time, no matter what is going on. In other words, we want to teach the dog to “listen,” to be obedient. When we say it, we mean it. This is what obedience training is all about – teaching the dog to comply with your commands.

Classroom Obedience

As you work with your dog through an obedience course, you will notice a gradual improvement in his training. He learns new commands like heel, sit, stay, etc. He also learns to be obedient and execute these commands when told. Often, the dogs get into a zone while in a training session, and can execute the commands to near perfection. However, when the dog is called upon in a more “real life” situation, you may see poorer performance. In fact, your dog may seem to have forgotten all that he has learned. For example, your dog runs out of the car door and you call on him to come, but he looks your way and then keeps going! How can this be? How is it that the dog did so well during a training session and then did so poorly when you *really* needed him to come?

Why This Happens

When you practice with your dog in a formal obedience training session, one of the things a good trainer does is attempt to set the dog up for success. You minimize distractions at first, and then you gradually increase at a pace that your dog can handle. This makes good training sense. Since the exercises are purposely set up for the dog to succeed, it is no surprise that he seems quite obedient!

Additionally, the dog can get into a “zone,” performing almost flawlessly for you. This is because the exercises become very predictable to the dog. The dog has “figured out” what you want. He wants to get the reward, and in those specific circumstances, he will get it every time.

Since real life does not set the dog up for success, and the dog also is not in his “zone of predictability,” we see a marked degradation in performance. So, how do we solve this dilemma?

The Solution: Practical Obedience Training

Practical obedience training is more than just proofing the dog in more and more difficult circumstances. It is the *systematic integration of obedience into everyday life*. It involves taking the obedience commands that the dog has learned in the classroom and using them in real life situations, preferably *when the dog least expects it!*

The obedience commands are the *tools* that you have learned; now you must *apply* those tools. Try the following ways to integrate your obedience training into the daily life/routine of the dog.

- **Surprise the dog** – issue a command when the dog least expects it: when you go outside, when the dog gets out of the car, or when you are out for a walk have him down and make him stay. At these times, the dog has other things on his mind than obedience. That’s OK, with your insistence, he soon learns to expect a command anytime, anywhere.
- **Learn to Earn** – have the dog do a stay whenever he wants something. This way the dog learns that he must be polite and listen to you before he gets what he wants (whether it’s food, going outside, putting on his leash, or anything else the dog may want). This teaches the dog the proper way to behave when he wants to express his desire for something (rather than jumping up and down like a spaz!).
- **Establish household rules** - make up rules around your house. It is not really important *what* rules you make up just make sure that what ever you decide, you enforce it! For example, I have the following rules at my house: no dogs on the furniture (any furniture), no dogs in the bedroom, no dogs in the kitchen if I am preparing food, no dogs in the dining room if I am eating. Rules actually contribute to the “inner peace” of the dog. Stress is actually reduced since the dog now knows, without a doubt (if you’re consistent!), that *these are the rules, this is what I can expect.*