



Teaching your dog impulse control is a valuable exercise! Through behaviour modification, your dog can learn to control their instinctive behaviour and reliably respond to your cues. Here are some recommendations for teaching your dog impulse control.

Training Process

We can build impulse control by setting up scenarios that offer your dog choice – your dog receives access to a reward by performing the desired behaviour. You want to make the correct choice easy for your dog through reward-based training.

Outside of training, it's also important to provide your dog with plenty of exercise and mental stimulation, which helps reduce excitability. You can provide enrichment through food puzzles, KONG® toys (filled with frozen treats or nut butter), training classes, going for a walk or training at home!

Remember to NOT punish undesired behaviour, as it can make your dog fearful. Below are some exercises you can practice with your dog.

Game: “It’s Your Choice”

Exercise 1: Open Hand

1. Hold a treat or kibble in a closed fist, level with your dog’s nose. Most dogs will paw, lick, nudge your hand or even bark. Hold strong, hold still and turn away slightly if needed. Do not say anything – wait for your dog to make the correct choice on their own.
2. Any time your dog gives the slightest indication of waiting (i.e., turning their nose or head away, making eye contact with you) open your hand.
3. Give your verbal marker, such as “yes!” – or if you practice clicker training, click your clicker – and allow your dog to have the treat. Repeat this exercise and gradually increase the length of time your dog displays calm behaviour before being rewarded.
4. Eventually, you can progress to having your hand open. Present your open palm with a treat to your dog. If your dog attempts to get the treat, simply close your hand to prevent them from getting it. Repeat until your dog shows any indication of waiting (i.e., not approaching your palm, looking away). If they show any attempt to not get the treat, give your verbal marker, such as “yes!” or click your clicker and allow your dog to get the treat.

Exercise 2: On the Floor

1. Move the exercise to the floor. Follow the same steps outlined in Exercise 1 but start by setting a treat on the ground.
2. If your dog approaches the treat, cover it quickly with your hand. When your dog shows any attempt to not get the treat (i.e., backs or looks away, stops) give your verbal marker, such as “yes!” or click your clicker.

Exercise 3: Dropping It

1. This is like Exercise 2, but rather than placing the treat on the floor, drop the treat onto the ground.
2. Start by dropping the treat very close to the ground. If your dog approaches the treat, cover it with your hand. Wait for your dog to stop approaching. As soon as they show any indication of waiting, give your verbal marker, such as “yes!” or click your clicker and allow them to get the treat.
3. As you progress, try dropping the treat from a higher distance and gradually drop the treat closer to your dog. Your dog should stay still and/or look to you when the treat is dropped. This is a great safety measure, in case you accidentally drop something toxic for your dog.

Keys to Success

- 🐾 Only speak to your dog when you give a verbal marker (praise) or a release cue. Stay quiet otherwise. Ignore unwanted behaviour and reward desired behaviour.
- 🐾 Only move to the next step when your dog is successful at the current one. This is essential for impulse control training. Rushing through these stages will not clearly communicate expectations for your dog.
- 🐾 If your dog is not food motivated, try using a favourite toy instead!
- 🐾 Reward consistently and timely. Immediately reward small improvements in behaviour. This process is called shaping. We gradually identify correct behaviours that our dog performs (through marking) to eventually get the fully desired response.
- 🐾 Keep training sessions short and practice daily, if possible.

Additional Resources:

For more help with your dog, consider one of the many great training classes offered at the Canine Enrichment Center. Find your next class by visiting:

<https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/classes/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:

askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please [Donate](#).