

Contact Training at Home

Here is a very basic outline of how to train great contact zone behaviour at home. If your training is clear and consistent and you train several times a week, your dog will learn this behaviour much more quickly than if you only do it when you come to class. We suggest using your dog's meal; remember that you can divide the meal into 3 or 4 portions so you can practice more times at once.

1st Level:

Make sure the texture at the bottom of the stairs is different from the stairs themselves [e.g., wooden stairs to carpet].

Put the dog on the **third** step up of a staircase. Have someone hold the dog there if you do not have a reliable "wait" or "stay" command." [It is worth training a wait/stay. It will make ALL your agility training easier ;)]

Put your **white** target plate at the bottom of the stairs with a treat on it. Make sure you place the target plate in the location that will require your dog to put its two front feet on the ground and leave the two hind legs on the stairs [= two on/two off].

Release the dog and say your verbal cue [e.g., Zone, Park, Touch ...].

As soon as [within 1 second] the dog eats the treat [i.e., drops its nose to the target plate], feed dinner (or part of their dinner) right there, with the dog in this position!

Release dog from this position and tell them how smart they are 😊

Oops: If the dog runs past the target plate, or comes off the steps, or swings its hind legs off the steps, **STEP ON THE TREAT** so that the dog is not rewarded, **BUT** also tell them they are a great dog for trying and be encouraging. **NO verbal or physical corrections; this is supposed to be fun.** Watch the tone of your voice. If you find yourself wanting to indicate your disappointment, try singing your comments. Most of us can't do that with an angry voice ;) Now, reset the dog, and try again. **If 3 steps is too hard, try 2 steps, or even 1 step. It's more about success than distance, believe it or not!** Better to give Sammie 20 treats for 1 step down, than to try 20 times to get 3 steps down and only give 1 treat.

2nd Level:

When you've got 90% success above, put the white target plate down but **no treat on the plate.**

If your dog is clicker savvy, **CLICK** (or say 'yes') when he noses the plate and then put down his meal.

If your dog is not clicker savvy, immediately after the dog bends its head to sniff the plate [within 1 second], put down their meal!

3rd Level:

When you've got 90% success above, **exchange the white target plate for a clear one** (we are fading the target plate).

Continue exactly as above. No treat on plate. Feed immediately after dog noses target plate.

4th Level:

When you've got 90% success above, **shrink the size of the clear target plate**.

Continue exactly as above.

5th Level:

When you've got 90% success above, **remove the target plate!** WAIT for the dog to drop its head in a sniffing motion and reward with the meal (or click and reward with the meal).

Continue exactly as above.

6th Level:

When you've got 90% success above, **move up the staircase!** Notice that this is the very LAST step in the process. What we are trying to do is train the dog to stop at the bottom; that is the critical behaviour that needs all the reinforcing. Running down the staircase is the easy part of the process (-:

Move up one stair at a time. Occasionally go back to a lower step and try there. No one likes to do something that is always harder ;) The higher the dog gets on the staircase, the harder it is for them to slow themselves down, so don't make it too hard too quickly.

Enjoy the process. You are simply teaching your dog an agility trick. As we often say in agility training, "it's not world peace!" So don't get too anxious and above all, don't get frustrated with your dog. If you run into a problem, ask us about it in class. EACH dog has its own struggle with the process somewhere along the way. And all dogs look great one week and then look like they've never even heard of the task another week. That's simply how learning proceeds.

Patience is indeed a virtue, in dog training 😊