

About Levels Training

Unlike traditional training classes where you attend for "x" weeks in a row and build on skills as you go along, working on a set curriculum with the entire class, Levels based training classes work on certain skills in each level, and you and your dog move up through the levels at your own pace. Because each level works on the same skills every week, you don't have to worry about what you're missing if you have to skip a week of class, you will just return to whatever level you're scheduled to be in and pick up where you left off. It is also beneficial for those of you who come to class with a dog that already has some basics because you can move up through the beginning levels quickly and spend more time working on the skills that you have yet to learn. For those of you who may be training your first dog or having difficulties with the training, you will be able to spend as much time as you need in a given level to master those skills before moving on. You may also go back and repeat skills in a lower level if you find you are having difficulty later on, even signing up for single sessions or groups of sessions in a particular level or levels to hone those skills after you have completed classes (for example when your well behaved pup suddenly becomes a juvenile delinquent!!). And you may want to come back months later to join level 4 for a class or 2 of proofing games, a fun way of refreshing your overall skills with your dog!

We've designed our basic levels classes with clear goals for you to meet in each level before moving up to the next level as follows:

Level 1:

Sit/Down/Stand must be performed without any food lure and you must be able to do a sequence of behaviors with just a single food reward (not rewarded for each sit, each down, etc). Your dog should also be able to respond to both verbal and hand signals with no more than 2 cues and they should be able to hold the behavior for at least 2 seconds.

Attention Skills: Your dog should respond to his name (the name game) within 3-4 seconds, respond to look/watch me within 3 seconds and hold it for 30 seconds with your hand in front of your face, then at least 20 seconds with your hand at your side.

Polite Greeting/Sit for Greeting (no jumping!): the handler should have a good understanding of how to regain control, block the dog from jumping & how to request and reinforce sitting with another person approaching (displaying moderate excitement) as well as for the approach of other dog/handler teams. This should be accomplished with no more than 2 cues to sit (without a food lure) and the leash shouldn't tighten more than 1 time. Dog should not shy away or jump and should take a treat and/or allow petting by the approaching person.

Touch: dog should be able to touch (nose target) both right & left hands, one at a time, with hand at least 2 feet away from the dog when cued and the handler shouldn't move their target hand after the cue. Handler should not have to cue more than once.

Level 2:

Recall: dogs should have a good head snap in response to their name, and a decent response to being called (within 3-5 seconds) not just by their person but by others in class, from a minimum of 10' away. Once recalled, the dog should sit or stand while the owner unclips the leash (if they've been dragging it) and reattaches it, or just attaches it if they are off leash. Again, the owner should demonstrate a clear understanding of the "rules".

Wait: dogs should wait for the food bowl for a period of 10 seconds with the bowl 2-3 feet away and with no more than 2 cues. Dogs should wait at the door with no more than 2 cues and 1 reset and at

least a 5 second duration with no forward movement once the door is opened, moving forward only when released.

Leave it: dog should be able to leave food on the floor for at least 5 seconds, ideally looking back to their person, before being rewarded with anything other than the food on the floor.

With both wait and leave it, the handlers should have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve performance and they should be asking for wait at the door when exiting the building WITHOUT being reminded.

Level 3:

Leash Manners: Dog should be able to walk moderately well without pulling, but more importantly the handler should have a good understanding of how to work with their dog if he starts to pull. At a minimum, dogs should be able to walk a loop or figure 8 around 2 cones spaced 15-20' apart, with the leash tightening no more than 3 times and with appropriate response by the handler to tightening.

Handler can give 2-3 cues and dog should be able to give eye contact for at least 1-2 seconds at any point before, during or after the walk. Treats can be used to reinforce but dog should not be lured.

Stay: dogs should be able to stay in a sit or a down for 1 minute with the handler next to them and for 10 seconds in front of their owner from 3 steps away. The handler shouldn't have to cue more than 2 times or reset the dog before they are released. The handler should have a clear understanding of how to continue to add distance, distraction and duration to their dogs stay.

Level 4:

Going to Place: the dog is able to go to the mat and sit or down without a food lure with handler 2 steps away from the mat & stay there for 10 seconds while handler does something (has conversation, ties shoe, eats something, sits in a chair). Handler should have a good understanding of how to gain distance & duration and be on their way to adding more distractions.

Take It/Drop It: Dog releases item (toy, chew, food bowl), or allows bowl to be picked up with no more than 3 cues within 5 seconds.

Proofing Games will be used to further enhance skills learned in levels 1-3 with distraction, difficulty, duration & distance and as much as possible using situations similar to real life. Students should have a good understanding of how to use learned behaviors to help their dogs maintain control no matter what's going on around them.

You can sign up for more classes at any time to finish the 4 levels if you haven't completed them all, to go back and work on a skill learned in an earlier level if desired, or to continue the proofing of skills (practicing learned behaviors with more difficulty and distraction to ensure your dog can respond in any situation) in level 4. And of course, you are welcome to sign up for any of our other class offerings as well, including Beyond Basics, Dogs About Town, Try It For Fun, Tricks & Games, Canine Good Citizen and so on (please see our website for details).