



# **BASIC DOG OBEDIENCE**

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*Welcome to Rotorua Dog Obedience Club's Beginner Obedience course.*

*The course runs for 8 weeks – all the formal exercises will be taught in the first 3 to 4 weeks, the following classes will be devoted to revision and improvement, and dealing with any particular training issues that you may have.*

*We hope you will enjoy these classes. Remember that training your dog does not end after eight weeks –there are many more things your dog can learn.*



Clockwise from top left:  
Competition obedience;  
Agility;  
CGC;  
Rally-O.

## **How dogs learn**

Dogs (especially puppies) don't have a very long concentration span, so you need to keep training sessions fairly brief. You could plan for two 10-minute sessions each day, or several 5-minute sessions. Practise each exercise three times, then take a little break, then repeat or work on a different exercise. Always aim to finish on a positive note, so save the exercise your dog is best at for last, so that you can finish off with lots of praise, and a game for a reward.

Don't try to train when you have just come home – your dog needs to run around for a while and let off some energy. But this is a good time for a game or some time together, all of which will be giving your dog some informal training.

The key to success is repetition and regular practice – this is much more successful than long but infrequent training sessions.

Your dog will learn some things much more quickly than others, so it's important not to get discouraged if some parts of your training are not going so well for a while.

## **First steps**

### **Getting attention**

Getting, and holding, your dog's attention is the first step to successful training. To get started, say your dog's name, and reward when he looks at you. It may be a while before your dog will make eye contact, but he should look at your face. Once he will do that, he will be receptive to what you are trying to teach him. A dog that is looking all around and not paying any attention to his handler will not be listening to what he is being taught.

### **Tone of voice and giving commands**

Dogs respond best to a light, enthusiastic, slightly high pitched tone of voice. By contrast, a low-pitched monotone won't help the dog to respond. If you think of training as play with a purpose, and keep it happy, you will get better results.

It also helps your dog if you (and other members of your household) consistently use the same commands. One word commands are best, eg. Fido COME – don't expect your dog to pick a command out of a string of chatter. Using his name first does however catch his ear and tell him that you are talking to him and he'd better pay attention.

### **Using food as a training aid**

Most dogs will work for food! You need to have some special treats for training, something different from your dog's regular food. Keep the pieces small, it's a treat, not a meal, and if you are concerned about your dog's weight, make allowance for the amount given as treats when measuring out his meals.

When training, the dog should be treated for an honest attempt to do what you ask. If you hold the food in front of his nose all the time, he will just follow it and he won't really be thinking about what he is doing. So hold the food supply in your right hand, and pass a piece across to your left hand to treat him when you are happy with what he is doing.

### **Constructive play**

A short play at the end of a training exercise rewards your dog for his efforts. It's also a valuable bonding tool. Keep it brief and remember that this is one play session that you must stop. When in class, keep your play area to a small space so that you don't disturb other dogs.

## **Basic exercises**

### **Sit**

With your treat in your hand, slowly move your hand over the top of your dog's nose and towards the back of his head, allowing the dog to follow the food in your hand. Tell the dog firmly and clearly to 'SIT'. As the dog raises his head to follow the food, his bottom will come down. As soon as the dog's bottom hits the ground give the treat and say 'good SIT'. Make sure you give the treat in a way that the dog maintains the sit and will not have to shift position to get the food; otherwise you may be rewarding the dog for getting up.

If the dog moves backwards instead of sitting, hold the food in your right hand, place your left hand on his rump and apply gentle downward pressure, whilst giving the 'SIT' command.

Reinforce his understanding of 'sit' when he is in position, by putting one hand flat on his chest and the other (with only slight downward pressure) on his rump, and repeating "good SIT".

Your dog should learn to sit when told, whatever position he is in, so don't confuse him by telling him to come or heel first – that kind of combined command comes later. Avoid saying 'sit down' as 'down' has other uses.

### **Walking on a loose lead**

The aim of this exercise is that the dog learns to walk beside you, under control, without pulling on the lead.

When we say "a loose lead" we mean that the lead has slack in it and hangs down from the collar. If your arm is stretched, the lead is taut, or you need two hands, then the lead is not "loose".



It is normal, though not compulsory, to train a dog to heel on the left. If you are right-handed this has the advantage of keeping the right hand free.

Competition obedience and breed showing require the dog to be on the handler's left side.

For general heeling/walking the dog should be in a position close enough to touch, and neither too far forward nor lagging behind you. A line down the side of your body should intersect a line from the dog's shoulder to his tail. If you do intend to enter obedience trials, you will also need to teach a close-heeling position, and it is recommended that you save use of the command 'CLOSE' for that type of heeling. Otherwise, you could use 'close' instead of 'heel' for general heel work.

The dog should learn that the command 'HEEL' means to come into this alongside position. For your dog's safety (and it is a legal requirement), you should always use a lead when walking by the roadside or in any public place other than a designated dog exercise area.

Start with the dog on your left side. Hold the lead in your LEFT hand, with enough length of lead to form a loop. Have the food in your RIGHT hand.

Say the dog's name and tell him to 'HEEL'. You may need to use some food initially to guide him into position, which should be approximately level with your left leg. Pass the food treat into your left hand, and praise and reward him when he comes into the correct position. If you have done sufficient practice in the "Attention" exercise, he will want to stay close and watch you.

Now take a step or two forward. While the dog is beside you praise him 'Good HEEL' and reward. Only praise while he is in the correct position, and only walk forward while he is beside you. Keep the food in your right hand, and just transfer it to your left hand when you wish to treat him.

If your dog pulls ahead of you, there are two useful ways to deal with this. First, instead of walking in a straight line, walk in a small circle, anticlockwise, so that you are turning into your dog (who is on your left). This will encourage him to step back so that you are not walking into him.

The second method, when he surges ahead, is to stop and turn away from him, so that he is now behind you. Give your HEEL command and reward him when he comes back into position. Move forward again and then stop before the dog can get ahead, reward the dog for staying beside you and not going ahead of you.

You will be stopping often at the beginning as your dog learns that he gets the treats for staying at your side. Your priority in training is to teach the position, rather than to walk any distance. Correct the dog as soon as the lead goes tight.

It will very likely be several months before your dog will consistently walk beside you on a loose lead, and there will always be lapses when something catches his interest. So that you can go for walks and have a pleasant time together, we strongly recommend the use of a Halti or a training harness with a chest attachment for walking out, which will reinforce your training without the need for constant correction.

### **Come when called**

The objective of this exercise is to ensure that your dog will come to you when called, and allow himself to be held.

With dog on lead, and food treat visible in your hand, call his name and 'COME'. Give lots of praise with the food reward, even if it has taken a long time for him to respond. Take a step backwards, and repeat. Make sure you use a happy voice to call him.

When he can do this reliably, start training the exercise off lead in a confined area; inside the house is good for starters, or in a small yard. If you give him the freedom of your whole section, you might have to wait a long time for him to respond. As long as he is safe, you should avoid chasing after him, as this tends to become a game (in his eyes).

Also train the exercise in an open area, using a long lead (6 to 9 meters long). When you have a reliable recall on the long lead, you can take him to an off-lead exercise area, but before letting him off the lead, do some practice recalls on the long lead first. This will also help him understand that he is not to go very far away from you (ie. about the length of the long lead). Letting him run around with the long lead attached also helps to reinforce this principle.

You should always keep your dog in sight – a dog out of sight is a dog out of control. For his protection and to avoid any potential incidents with other animals or people, you should always be able to see your dog and to call him to you when necessary.

At first, when you call him to you, you may simply take hold of his collar and put the lead on; then you should start teaching him to sit when recalled, and to wait quietly for you to put his lead on. Remember to praise him for returning.

### **Important points about calling your dog**

Use a happy, high, girly voice, and with a puppy or small dog, squat down so that your face is nearer his level.

Every time that you call your dog to come, make sure that he comes close enough for you to touch/pat and praise him, so that when you don't have any food, this is his reward.

Never call your dog to come if you are going to tell him off, coming when called always has to be a good experience for him.

Carry treats in your pocket most of the time, so that you can call him for no other reason than to give a treat. This also avoids his learning that coming always means stopping play or being confined.

Don't bend over him or lean forward as this will make him stop further away from you.



Squat down to encourage a small dog to come close

### **Wait**

The 'Wait' command is useful for occasions when the dog is to hold his position briefly, until you give a subsequent command. We will teach the command first as a 'wait for food' exercise.

With dog sitting, give the 'WAIT' command, put food bowl down 1 metre in front of dog. Dog is to wait for the release command 'OK' before moving to eat food.

You may need to do this exercise on the lead for the first few days, and perhaps to use a hand signal to reinforce the 'wait' command.

Start with a short wait, and gradually increase the time, and always use a release command, such as 'OK' so the dog knows when he is allowed to move. If



the dog moves before the 'OK', and you allow him to eat the food, then you are teaching him to break the wait.

Use 'WAIT' before allowing your dog out of a car, and when going through gates or doors. You must always go ahead through gates and doors – for safety, and because the first one through is the boss!

Don't confuse this command with 'Stay', which we will come to later. You should not use the 'Stay' command if you are going to call your dog away from the position that you left him in.

### Recall

Now that you have taught your dog to come when called, and to wait, you can combine these exercises for the Recall.

Put your dog into the sit or down position. Give a firm WAIT command. Turn and walk away for about 5 steps. Turn to face your dog. Pause – don't call him immediately – then call him to come. At first you should give him praise and reward simply for coming.



When he is good at this, teach him to sit in front of you before he gets his reward. When you turn around to face him, stand with your feet apart and your knees bent forward slightly. The distance between your knees should be about the width of your dogs' chest. You should feel as though you are leaning back from the knees, because if you lean forward over the dog he will tend to stop too far away. Ideally he should come in close enough that his shoulders touch your knees – use your food treat to bring him in close – and this will ensure that he sits straight.

To prevent his anticipating your call to come, sometimes you should just return to him and reward him for waiting. If he breaks the wait, go back and put him in the same place and position as before, then walk away, return and reward the wait (if successful) without calling him.

## Tie-ups

It is very useful to teach your dog to wait quietly while he is tied briefly while you are busy doing something else. Practise this exercise with your dog sitting or lying down, stay close by so that you can reassure him, and reward him for staying quiet.

## Down

Learning to lie down quietly while you are busy with something else is an important social skill for your dog. It's also a good position for your dog to adopt when meeting small children (under supervision, of course), and in any situation where his moving around might put him at risk.



*Relaxed down position*

Suitable commands for this exercise are MAT or DROP or DOWN. Some trainers do not like the word 'down' because it is often used in other situations. It is your choice, but be consistent, and if you use 'down' don't use this word except for when you mean 'lie down'. For example, use a different command for getting off furniture, or for not jumping up on people: OFF is useful for those situations.

Notice that there are two possible down positions: the crouch, and the relaxed down. The crouch is fine for a 'wait', but your dog will not hold this position for long, so you should teach him to go down into the relaxed position.

Also, for preference, you should teach your dog to go directly to the down position, without putting him in a sit first. If you have to start with a sit, treat it as a separate exercise with praise, before proceeding to the down. Otherwise there is the risk that your dog will think that sit is good but down is better, and will go down when you want him to sit.

Show the dog the food in your hand, lower your hand to the ground. Give your chosen command. Your dog's head will go down – if his back end doesn't go to the ground, push down on his rump, and only when the dog is lying down give him the food. Praise him: 'good DOWN'. Remember to give the 'OK' release command so that the dog knows he can get up again.

If your dog will not lie down by himself, proceed as follows. With your dog sitting, stand with your feet forming a V behind his bottom. Lean forward and, if you are right-handed, use your left hand to hold his left front foot up and close to his chest. Now use your right hand to push his right shoulder across and down, until he is lying on his left side. You should roll him down gently, and take care not to hit his elbow on the ground. As the dog folds onto the ground, give your 'down' command. Hold the dog there until he relaxes. Then praise him 'good DOWN' (or whatever word you are using). Repeat until he learns to go down by himself.

If you are still having difficulty and you have a small dog, you can use a game to teach the position. Kneel down with one leg bent up to form a tunnel under your knee. Use the food treat to encourage your dog to go under your leg. At first just do this, luring the dog back and forth, and don't use the 'down' command. When he is going willingly, lower your knee so that he has to go down to get through and instead of giving the food hold it at ground level below your knee, and only give the food when he goes down – then you can start associating the position with the 'down' command.

### **Teaching your dog to Stay**

The concept of stay is that the dog remains where it is placed (in a Sit or Down) until you come back and release him. Many trainers now do not use a 'STAY' command in association with SIT or DOWN – the idea being that the dog should continue sitting or lying down until released, and so the 'stay' command is at best redundant, and may even introduce an unnecessary confusion in the dog's mind. Be guided by your trainer's advice about these commands.

If you do use STAY, be careful not to use this command when you really mean 'WAIT for further instructions'. 'STAY' tells your dog to relax until you come back for him; WAIT tells the dog to remain alert.

Once your dog has learned to lie down and sit on command, you can begin to train him to remain in position for increasing lengths of time. The dog must stay in place until you come back, praise/reward him, and give the release command.

Give the Down (or Sit) command, and praise/reward him in position. Keep a hand on his shoulders if necessary to hold him there and repeat DOWN. Hold him there, initially for just a few seconds, tell him 'good DOWN', then release him with the 'OK' command. We recommend that you also use a physical cue

for the release, to avoid inadvertent release. The physical cue could be a sign or touch, and should be distinct from any other sign you use.

Once he can remain in place without being held, you can use a hand signal in front of his face as you say SIT or DOWN. A hand signal is a very powerful clear way to reinforce these commands. Build up to at least 10 seconds before progressing to the next step.

Now give the SIT or DOWN command and move one small step away. Go back quickly and praise and then release him. You must do this before he moves. If he moves, do not praise him, make him lie back down in the same place as before, and start again.

When this is successful, increase the time a little before you return to him. Next time, increase the distance a little. If he makes a mistake and breaks the stay, return to the stage you were last successful with, and repeat a few times, before progressing again.

### **Important points to remember with the Stay:**

Return to the dog before he makes a mistake. In order to be sure of this you must progress very slowly, and always praise him while he is still in position. It can help to hold the dog in place while praising. Then give the verbal 'OK' and physical cue to release him.

Don't give any praise or reward if he gets up before you release him.

Finally, do not call the dog off a stay. Stay means 'I am coming back'.

### **Socialisation**

By the end of this course you should be able to walk your dog past another handler/dog pair without your dog lunging at the other dog. You should be able to tell your dog to sit or down quietly beside you while you talk to another person. Another person should be able to approach your dog with a quiet word and a pat, without your dog jumping up on them, or showing excessive nervousness.

We will do various exercises in class to help you with this, but you should also use any opportunity you get, with friends or helpful strangers, to practise these social skills.

## **Common problems**

### **Jumping up**

When puppies jump up on people, it is usually to get attention, or they jump on other dogs for play. When older dogs jump up on people or on other dogs it may be excitement or play, but it may also be an attempt to get dominance. Uninvited jumping up on people can be corrected by:

1. Turning your back;
2. Tell the dog to SIT
3. Pushing the dog away and saying 'OFF' or other command;

When your dog is playing with other dogs, you should intervene before his play becomes annoying or threatening, and stop the game. The Leave command is useful in this situation; or tell him to Come, and give him an alternative activity.

It will also help with training if you ask all visitors to your house to ignore your dog for the first 5 minutes. The dog will learn that he will get a pat and talk later, but that he is not the centre of attention when anyone comes to the door.

### **Mouthing**

Puppies don't realize how sharp their teeth are, so they need to be taught not to nip hard, and they must learn to take food gently from your hand.

Your response to hard mouthing should be to make a little squealing sound (just as another puppy would make) and move your hand out of his reach or push him gently away. Then offer your hand again and keep repeating until he realises he mustn't bite hard. You should avoid telling him off, because what you need to teach is gentleness – you don't want to give him an aversion to having your hand in his mouth.

To teach him to take food gently, hold the food so that he can't take it by grabbing, but only gets it if he waits for you to give it to him. Squeal as above if he grabs. When he has learnt, but needs a reminder, the command 'Gentle' works well.

## **Digging**

Some dogs really like to dig – you can allow digging in certain areas if you wish, or you can train your dog not to dig: say ‘AAH AAH, NO DIG’ or “LEAVE’ and provide a distraction.

## **Barking**

Barking for a purpose is good – it’s a fundamental part of the human/dog relationship. However, aimless or prolonged barking is really annoying.

Always investigate when your dog barks (he is barking to get your attention), then praise him and tell him to be QUIET. The principle here is that it’s his job to warn you, and your job to sort out the problem!

When he understands ‘QUIET’ you can anticipate barking triggers, eg. pedestrians, and say “QUIET’ before he barks to teach him that you’re already in control. When you are not present, do not leave your dog in a location where he can see things that cause nuisance barking, eg. pedestrians or the next door neighbours.

Don’t be surprised if your previously quiet puppy suddenly starts barking at everything. Territorial behaviour usually starts at adolescence, and that’s when you should start training the behaviour that you want.

## **Destruction**

Puppies investigate everything with their teeth, and while your pup is going through this learning stage it is your job to keep everything that is harmful, and anything that you don’t want to be chewed, out of his way.

When you are with him, gently discourage inappropriate mouthing and give him a suitable toy that he can get his teeth into without harm. If you just tell him off for picking things up, you will have to overcome his learned reluctance if you later want to teach him to retrieve.

If you have to leave him at home unsupervised, you can crate him for short periods. Otherwise you need to arrange some safe and secure area in your house where he can be left.

The destructive stage can last up to about 18 months of age, depending on your dog’s nature and your opportunities for educating him.

## **Health and wellbeing**

Your dog should allow you to inspect his eyes, teeth, ears and feet without making a fuss. It is important that you know what condition these are in when they are healthy, to be able to recognize when something is not as it should be.

You should be able to wipe your dog's eyes (with a tissue), open his mouth to check the teeth, clean his ears (never put water in the ears, only use veterinary solutions), wash his feet, check between the toes and trim the nails, and generally check for lumps and bumps. In addition, dogs should be groomed or brushed regularly to remove tangles, matted undercoat, dead skin and anything the dog picks up in his coat.

Ears should look clean inside, the skin should not be red and they should smell sweet. Eyes should be clear and bright; any persistent discharge should be referred to your vet. It's good practice to check your dog's teeth after he has had a bone, in case any small pieces have lodged between the teeth.

Skin irritations or allergies are not uncommon and can be very troublesome. Suspected food allergies must be referred to your vet. Never give your dog onion or chocolate – these are the most common causes of serious illness.

Common skin irritants in the Rotorua region are the plants Wandering Jew (sometimes called Weary Willie) and Onion Weed; and Duck Itch, which is caused by a burrowing organism picked up in ponds or slow water. For these, avoidance is the key. Minor outbreaks can be treated with a veterinary wash and application of a soothing cream.

Build health inspections into your routine, so that your dog gets used to being handled. Your vet will also appreciate your well-behaved dog.

Your dog should visit the vet at least once a year for a general check up and to have vaccinations renewed.

We recommend micro-chipping for all dogs (it is required by law for all puppies over 3 months old, other than farm dogs) as it provides the best chance for your dog to be returned to you if it is lost.

## **Leadership**

Your dog should be able to rely on you for leadership and protection. He will be happy for you to tell him what to do, and when to do it; but you must be consistent and fair – don't expect him to guess what you want.

### **You are the boss**

Dogs are dogs. They are not children and they are not cats, not even the small dogs. Dogs need someone to be in charge, and if no one else seems to be in charge the dog will assume the position of pack leader, ie. the dog will be the boss unless you are.

You need to be the boss all the time, so if you give an order you must make sure your dog does not ignore it. Don't give an order you can't enforce, eg. when he is a long way away (you should avoid letting this happen) or playing with another dog, because then he may ignore you and will learn that he can ignore you. However, as your training progresses you will find that your control in these situations improves, and your dog will learn to keep one ear open for your commands.

Don't keep repeating commands; you shouldn't have to say anything more than twice. So don't tell your dog to Sit, Sit, Sit, Sit, Sit –tell the dog to SIT, SIT, and then make him sit.

A dog should not be allowed to sit on any piece of furniture he chooses. Even an indoor dog should have his own bed, and you should decide which other pieces of furniture (if any) he is to be allowed onto.

If he is allowed to sit anywhere he chooses, then he may think he is the boss, and the boss is entitled to growl or nip when someone else tries to sit in his place. If you share seating with your dog (eg. the sofa) and he shows any sign of protest when you go to sit down, then you should order him off immediately and not let him back until some time after you are seated.

Teach him not to get up onto forbidden places by saying 'No' or 'Off' when he is thinking about getting up; letting him get up and then ordering him off will not achieve what you want.



## **Important ways to demonstrate your position as the Boss**

You control access to food. Teach your dog to sit and wait when you put his food down, then tell him 'OK'. Un-eaten food should be removed if he walks away from it. Control of food gives you your ultimate power. You should be able to tell your dog to give up food, eg. a bone, when you want to put it away.

You control access to one special toy. Choose one that your dog is really keen on and bring it out no more than once a day for a few minute. Make sure that you finish the game with this toy before your dog is tired of it, and store the toy out of his reach.

Play 'fetch' on a lead or in a small confined space until the dog reliably brings the toy back. Then you can throw it out in the open, but if he runs off with it just turn and walk away: the game is over. The game only continues when he plays by your rules.

If your dog decides to start a game by bringing you a toy, make sure that you are the one to stop the game, so that he doesn't think that he is in charge of games.

You control access to gateways and doorways. Use the WAIT command, followed by OK once you are through. You must insist – every time – on going first.

## Objectives of this course:

By the end of the course, you should be able (or be well on the way) to do the following:

- Socialisation: Dog to sit on a loose lead beside handler whilst someone walks another dog past them. Handler should talk to his/her dog to hold his attention.
- Socialisation: Dog to remain on a loose lead (sitting or lying) whilst a stranger greets handler and engages in a brief conversation. Stranger will quietly greet and pat dog.
- Walk at Heel: Dog to walk at heel on a loose lead and to sit on the handler's left side when the handler halts. Handler to walk and be able to turn left and right and about-turn as directed, without the dog surging ahead or knocking into the handler. Food may be used to keep the dog's attention, but should not be given continuously. Remember that you should talk to your dog and encourage him to maintain the correct position.
- Return to Handler: The trainer will hold the dog (with the long-line attached, if necessary). Handler will walk away. Handler will then halt and turn to face dog, and call dog. Dog to come and sit quietly, close enough for handler to attach a lead.
- Wait (wait for food): Dog to sit and wait (on loose lead) while handler places food in container 1 metre in front of dog. Dog not to move until handler gives OK release command.
- Tie up: Dog should remain calm when tied up (handler in sight) for 2 minutes.
- Stay: Dog to sit or lie down when given command and hand signal, and to remain in that position with handler at least 3 paces in front of dog. Dog not to get up until handler returns to dog and gives OK command. The time should be increased in steps of 5-10 seconds, as the dog achieves each milestone, up to ½ minute for the sit and 1 minute for the down.

Notes:

**Further training:**

*Obedience*  
*Canine Good Citizen programme*  
*Rally-O*  
*Agility*  
*Flygility*

*Training for pleasure or for competition*

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