

Learning to “Say Please”

By Kim Downing

It might sound odd to speak of asking your dog to say please. After all, he can't actually talk! The good news is that we aren't talking about actual speaking in this case. What we do mean is teaching the dog how to have patience and how to ask politely for something.

We all expect a young child to say please and thank you in exchange for a multitude of items; yet, we don't expect the same thing of our dogs. Why not? That's a good question with a not as clear answer. Likely, we think of dogs as animals and so just don't put that level of expectation on them.

In actuality, if more people expected their dogs to have patience and manners, we'd have a much more civilized doggie nation!

Getting your dog to say please is actually pretty simple. It involves the simple command of Sit and ideally your dog will be giving you focused attention during this time as well. A dog can already know the command of Sit, or you can begin teaching at this moment.

So, what do you do? Basically, you're going to require your dog to sit with his bottom on the floor before he is given something. You can ask him to sit if he knows this command, or you can wait for him to offer a sit himself and then reward that.

No more jumping up to grab at the toy in your hand! This demonstrates lack of patience and an insistent “Give it to me now!” attitude. Instead, hold the ball until your dog calmly sits, and then (and only then!) throw the ball for your dog.

There are so many scenarios where a dog can learn to have more patience. Many people think of the dinner bowl, and this is a good starting point, but be more creative than that. Toys, as illustrated above, are an excellent option. How about going in and out of the door? Ask your dog to sit patiently prior to you letting him go outside or return back in. The same can go for getting in the car to go for a ride.

The goal should be that your dog learns that sitting is the way to access the things he wants in life! Then he will sit as an almost automatic command (think when you get the treat bag out and he can't sit fast enough) anytime he wants something from you. This is so much better than jumping on you, barking at you, pawing and clawing you to pieces, dancing around, and anything else he can think to do. Instead of mindlessly going into a frenzy, he will sit and wait patiently.

Teaching your dog to say please is one of the best things you can teach him how to do!