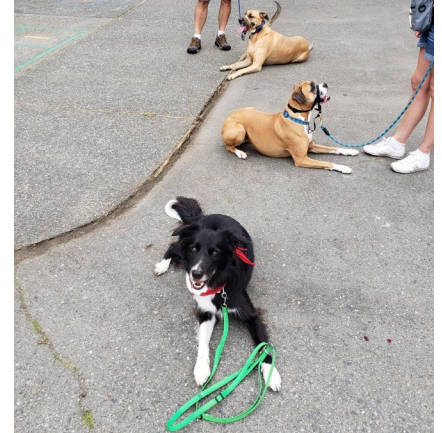


# Relaxation Protocol

Relaxation protocols will help your dog navigate many aspects of life, especially when what we want goes against their instincts. These protocols will teach your dog to relax and in place when you move about the house, when a visitor arrives, and when you take your dog out in public. Setting the stage right away for energy control is important. Teaching a dog to relax and be “off duty” is one of the kindest and most useful things we can do for our pets.



## Settle

A settle is like a down but with a hip flopped over and it has an implied duration and calmness. You can shape, capture, or lure this behaviour to start, depending on what works best for your dog's personality and learning history.

**Tip: Place the treats on the ground rather than feeding them to your dog's mouth. This helps magnetize your dog to the ground rather than keeping their focus up to your hand or pocket.**

We will never ask for a settle and then ask for an explosive fast behaviour. For example, we wouldn't use settle while playing fetch because the expectation for the fun chase will change the energy state of the dog in a settle. If you are playing with multiple dogs, you can use a settle to help one wait. When it is that dog's turn call them to you and ask for a sit or other behaviour before you begin fetch.

Settle will be your dog's job when you are vacuuming, when you stop to chat with a neighbour, when a friend pops by to drop off cake, etc. Pay your dog well for this game! Put a lot of value in teaching your dog to relax and you will have a lovely dog who you can take to a friend's BBQ, to the hardware store, to the bank, or anywhere you like.

## Treats

You will use a lot of food to train your dog to relax. You can use your dog's meals to train or other healthy treats. Use treats that are medium or lower value to keep the energy level down. If your dog isn't keen on training for food, choose something exciting enough for them to want to play training games. Consider asking for help to train food motivation as this is a common issue that we help people work through. Although we train many skills using toys, toys are not appropriate reinforcers for relaxing as it encourages excitement rather than relaxation.

Examples:

- Kibble if your dog eats kibble
- Carrots, Peas, Sweet Potato, or other veggies
- Beef or lamb lung



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## Markers

As you complete each step in the protocols, calmly say “good” then reach into your treat pouch or pocket and deliver a treat by placing it onto the ground in front of them. Some people choose not to say “good” and that is ok too, the best method depends on your dog’s training history. We advise you not to say “yes” or use a clicker however, as these markers are often paired with upbeat, fast, fun games and can affect the energy of the settle.

**Ideally, use a treat pouch or easy to access pocket rather than holding the treats in your hand. This little tip will help transition your dog to listening when you don’t have treats on you and it also helps keep excitable or food crazy dogs a little calmer.**

## Talking To Your Dog

Please talk to your dog as you work through the protocol if it feels natural to you. Chat with your dog as you might a young child, explaining what you are doing. It is amazing how much talking to them helps some dogs stay calm. Read more about talking to your dog here: [“The Mr. Rogers Hack”](#)

## Mat or No Mat?

Some people will choose to use a mat or dog bed when training this protocol. A mat is handy as you can take it with you when you train in new locations and the presence of the mat helps your dog clue into the game a little faster. However, the end goal is typically that you don’t need the mat. Without a mat, you will take more time to help your dog in new locations. If you use a mat you will need to fade the mat out of the training later but the best option varies dog to dog. If you have a very anxious or excitable dog, or if your dog does not like to lie down on cold or hard surfaces, the mat is likely a good option. Raised dog beds, bathmats, and towels make great relaxation mats.

## Error Handling

What if your dog gets up during the protocol? Mistakes happen, don’t sweat it. Simply ask your dog to settle again, feed them, and move right back to it.

If your dog gets up once you have two options.

1. Try the exact scenario again, in case it was just a simple mistake.
  2. Move back a step or two and start again where you know your dog can succeed.
- Dogs don’t need to make mistakes in order to learn. My preference for error handling is to move back enough steps that you know your dog can succeed, building up confidence and motivation.

What if your dog gets up twice in a row? Now we really need to be proactive in building confidence and understanding. I suggest you go back to the very beginning of the Basic Protocol. If your pup is still struggling, it is ok to go for a long sniffy walk for you both to decompress, then try again tomorrow.

## Credit: Dr Karen Overall

Dr Overall created a Relaxation Protocol that was and is used by trainers all over the world. Along with her other work, it was a fantastic tool for many of us. We have written these updated protocols, based on Dr Overall’s work, to suit our current needs with our students as well as our own dogs. <https://www.karenoverall.com/>



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# Basic Protocol

Begin with this protocol and advance it as your dog's level of understanding increases. Keep the error handling protocol in mind and reinforce many easy reps to keep the momentum going and to build value in relaxing.

- Settle for 2 seconds
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle for 3 seconds
- Settle while you lift one foot off the ground
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you take one step
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you take one step and return
- Settle while you clap your hands lightly once
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle for 3 seconds
- Settle while you take 2 steps and return
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you take one step, count to 3, and return
- Settle for 5 seconds



## Keys to adding difficulty while building strong, confident behaviours

- Always sandwich challenging reps with easy ones. I.e. If 20 seconds is new or challenging for your dog, practice a 3 second rep both before and after the 20 second rep.
- If you add a distraction such as a friend sitting on a couch, start over from the beginning.

## Take It On The Road

Practice the Basic Protocol at home, in the yard, on your walks, in the park, and anywhere you regularly take your dog. When the distraction level increases by training in a new environment, be sure to start the protocol from the very beginning or as far back as needed for your dog to be very successful.

# Teatime Protocol

This protocol is written to help your dog relax in place while you make a cup of tea. This can be modified to include any routine task such as asking your dog to relax while you:

- prepare their dinner,
- give medication to another pet,
- feed the cat, etc.

Begin with the Basic Protocol. Once it is easy, split other daily tasks into small pieces. Splitting big tasks into small achievable tasks is the key to building strong behaviours.

- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle for 15 seconds
- Settle while you take one step and return
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you take two steps and return
- Settle for 7 seconds
- Settle while you take three steps and return
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you take three steps, touch the kettle for one second, and return to your dog
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you take three steps, pick up the kettle for one second, and return to your dog
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you take three steps, pick up the kettle, take 1 step towards the sink, and return to your dog
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you move to the kettle, pick it up, move to the sink, and fill the kettle, then return to your dog



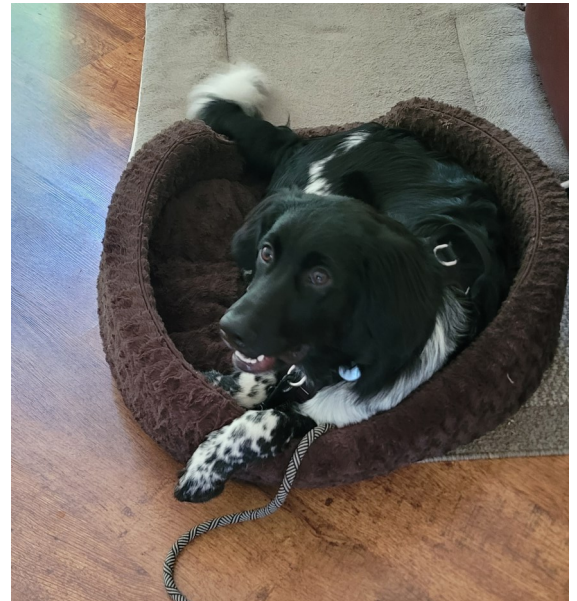
**Practice over multiple sessions, only advancing as fast as your dog allows. All dogs learn at different rates, so be patient. Move slow enough that the process has very few errors. This will build a strong, relaxed end behaviour.**



# Visitors at the Door Protocols

These protocols are written to help your dog relax in place while visitors arrive. Begin with the Basic Protocol and the Teatime Protocol. If the protocols as written are too challenging, break it down into smaller pieces with less duration or less intensity. The right protocol is the one that sets your dog up for success.

**Choose a location to settle your dog that is ideally within view of the door, but at least 10' away.**



Train this when you do not have actual visitors. Manage real visitors by putting your dog in a crate or bedroom when they arrive. Once you have completed the protocols, have visitors enter and get comfortable seated, then bring your dog out on leash and practice the Basic Protocol, working up to practicing when visitors arrive.

These protocols are not a behaviour modification program to address fearful or aggressive behaviour from your dog when people arrive. Instead, it is a foundation on top of which a behaviour modification program can be built. If your dog has aggressive or extremely fearful behaviour when people come to the door, please ask for help from a certified professional.

The next three pages contain protocols that are intended to be worked through in order, and only after completing the Basic Protocol and Teatime Protocol.

# Door Opening Protocol



- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle for 15 seconds
- Settle while you take two steps towards the door and return
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you take three steps towards the door and return
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, touch the door for one second, and return to your dog
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, touch the doorknob for one second, and return to your dog
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, open the door 1" for 1 second, and return to your dog
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, open the door 1" for 5 seconds, and return to your dog
- Settle for 7 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, open the door 3" for 1 seconds, and return to your dog
- Settle for 5 seconds

Practice this protocol over multiple sessions, increasing either the length of time that the door is open, or how far you open the door. Do not increase two criteria in one repetition. For safety, you may tether your dog so that they cannot run out the door. A baby gate between your dog and the door is another great option.



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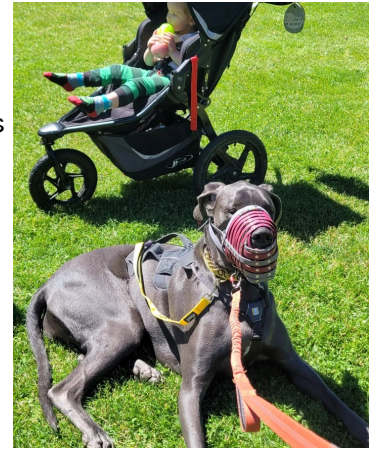


# Knocking (Doorbell) Protocol

Before attempting this protocol, complete the Door Opening Protocol and comfortably be able to ask your dog to settle while you fully open the door for 20 seconds. If the protocol as written is too challenging, break it down into smaller pieces with less duration or less intensity. The right protocol is the one that sets your dog up for success.

This protocol is written for knocking at the door, but anytime we write 'knock' you can substitute 'ring the doorbell'. You will not use your actual doorbell to start. Instead, either use YouTube to find doorbell sounds, or record your own doorbell on your phone. It is important at the beginning to control the volume of the doorbell, which you can do using your phone and YouTube or the recording.

- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle for 20 seconds
- Settle while you knock lightly on a wall or table twice
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, touch the doorknob for one second, and return to your dog
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you knock lightly on a wall or table twice, then pause for one second before returning to your dog.
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, open the door fully for 5 seconds, and return to your dog
- Settle for 20 seconds
- Settle while you knock lightly on a wall or table twice, then pause for two seconds before returning to your dog.
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you knock a little harder on a wall or table twice, then pause for 2 seconds before returning to your dog.
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, open the door fully for 20 seconds, and return to your dog
- Settle for 7 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, knock lightly and return to your dog.
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you knock lightly on a wall or table, walk to the door, open the door for 2 seconds, and return to your dog.



Practice this protocol over multiple sessions, increasing either the length of time that the door is open or the intensity of the knocking. Do not increase two criteria in one repetition. For safety, you may tether your dog so that they cannot run out the door. A baby gate between your dog and the door is another great option.

# Talking Protocol

Before attempting this protocol, complete the Knocking (Doorbell) Protocol and comfortably be able to ask your dog to settle while you knock loudly, walk to the door, and fully open the door for 20 seconds. If the protocol as written is too challenging, break it down into smaller pieces with less duration or less intensity. The right protocol is the one that sets your dog up for success. Think about the phrases you are likely to use when you have visitors. Use your natural language in the protocol rather than the generic ones we include.

- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you say “Hi! Come on in!”
- Settle for 20 seconds
- Settle while you knock lightly on a wall or table twice
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, open the door for 5 seconds, and return to your dog
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you knock lightly on a wall or table twice, say “Come on in!”, then pause for 1 second and return to your dog.
- Settle for 10 seconds
- Settle while you knock, say “Hi Joan!”, walk to the door, open the door fully for 15 seconds, and return to your dog
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you knock lightly on a wall or table twice, say “Hi Bob!”, then pause for 2 seconds and return to your dog.
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you knock a little harder on a wall or table twice, say “Come on in!” then pause for 2 seconds before returning to your dog.
- Settle for 5 seconds
- Settle while you walk to the door, open the door fully for 20 seconds, say “Hi, thank you for the pizza!”, and return to your dog
- Settle for 7 seconds
- Settle while you knock, walk to the door, open the door fully for 20 seconds, say “Hi, thank you for the pizza!”, and return to your dog
- Settle for 5 seconds



## Surprise!

Once you have completed the protocols, integrate the surprise factor. When your dog isn't expecting training, knock or speak to an imaginary visitor, ask them to settle on their bed, and rehearse a few repetitions. Practice this no more than twice a day, and balance it with non-surprise sessions.