



# School For The Dogs

## TRAINING STEPS

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### THE SFTD RELAXATION PROTOCOL

Helping your dog learn to authentically relax both on cue and on their own can have many benefits. It will give you more control over your dog's behavior in potentially stressful or exciting situations and will also encourage your dog to develop more self-calming behaviors in real life.

#### 1. Down with duration on mat

- Set up a mat or blanket and sit in a comfortable chair nearby (or for mildly distracting environments, sit on floor.)
- Lure dog into down position using fist full of treats.
- Build for duration in down position by slowly releasing one treat at a time for up to 1 minute.
- Stop feeding and pause. If dog remains in a down for 1 second, release another.
- Build for duration by ping-ponging and increasing time as dog is able.
- If dog stands up at any point give him several seconds to decide to go back to mat and/or lay down again.
- If he chooses to do either of these on his own, reward heavily and rebuild into down position.
- If he doesn't, lure again.
- Increase criteria so dog is laying down without a lure as he gets more confident.
- If dog is struggling, you may use a soft "yes" as a verbal marker, but ensure your volume is very quiet so as not to cause more excitement. It is not recommended to use a clicker for this exercise.
- Note: If you are working in a mildly distracting environment have your dog on leash, however it is best to build this skill with no distractions at first.

#### 2. Building Duration

- Rebuild level 1 but this time reinforce when dog stays down for 1-2 seconds only.
- Shape for longer durations gradually, offering in some easy short ones instead of only increasing the duration as you go.

#### 3. Building for Disengagement & Relaxed Positioning

- Once dog is confident with level 2, begin to reinforce only when dog is NOT looking at you or treats.
- Also select for more "relaxed" behaviors such as hip shifts and head rests.
- Note: adjust criteria as needed - if a dog is distracted or aroused by other stimuli, feed for dog staying down in crate as he notices. Then go back to disengagement and relaxed positioning.
- Increase duration of these "restful" behaviors dog as is successful.

#### 4. Adding Distance in a Chair or Standing

- If not yet able to be sitting in a chair, increase criteria to be able to sit in chair with dog remaining on mat, not focused on handler.
- Add in standing up. Reinforce dog for staying on mat heavily at first.
- Sit back down and repeat until you can easily stand up and change positions with dog noticing but remaining relaxed.

#### 5. Adding Distractions

- Add in walking around and other distractions while being mindful of criteria.
- Select one new criteria at a time: ie. movement, other stimuli, etc.
- If you have been practicing in the same environment take your mat elsewhere. Remember any time you increase criteria for one aspect you must decrease for others. For example, if you change environments you might need to start again at stage 2.