



Relaxation Down

Purpose & Goals

The goal of Relaxation Down is not just to get your dog to lie down. Lying down happens naturally. The real goal is to help your dog learn to calm down **ON THEIR OWN**. We want your dog to let go of crazy energy and learn deep relaxation, not just to lay down.

Frequency

Once a day is great, but even once or twice a week will help. After 10-20 times, you'll see your dog getting relaxed faster and staying relaxed longer, even in situations that used to make them excited. Your dog will also start relaxing on their own during free time.

Calm vs. Relaxed

A dog that seems calm (lying down, disengaged) but jumps up quickly people/dogs move or a noise happens, is not really relaxed. That would be a resting dog, and all dogs rest sometimes. Our goal is to help your dog work through its own energy and become deeply relaxed. We want to see improvement in three areas: 1) Time it takes to reach Target Behavior, 2) Time spent in Target Behavior, and 3) Difficulty of the environment that your dog can reach and stay in Target Behavior.

Helping An Anxious Dog

This is the most important exercise an anxious dog can do. Many dogs have trouble with anxiety or high energy. Doing regular Relaxation Downs can help lower their anxiety over time. It might be tough at first, but it gets easier for your dog. If your dog has a lot of trouble at the start, it means they desperately need this exercise and will benefit the most from it.

The Role of Frustration and Raising the Challenge

It's important for your dog to feel a bit frustrated during Relaxation Down to learn and grow. If your dog lies down and sleeps quickly because they are tired from other exercises, it doesn't help our goal. Start a Relaxation Down in a quiet, easy place. For more relaxed dogs, add a bit of challenge, like doing it in a busier area (a busy living room or your backyard/front yard).

If your dog really struggles the first few times you do a Relaxation Down, you make it easier by exercising them beforehand or start a repetition during a time of day when your dog naturally has low energy.

Steps	
1	Step on the leash.
2	NO downward pressure on the leash to begin the exercise and the handler should never add any downward pressure to the leash.
3	Ignore dog's behavior through the entire process including not engaging your dog physically, visually, or verbally. No corrections (except for chewing on a leash that might break it) and no rewards.
4	Wait for dog to reach Target Behavior and complete first cycle. Handler should take note of how long dog was in target behavior in the first cycle.
5	Dog will enter the second cycle on his own.
6	When dog reaches Target Behavior after the second cycle, handler should drop the leash or non-energetic release.

One Relaxation Down = Reaching Target Behavior Twice

What is Target Behavior?

1. Touching ground from nose to tail
2. Hips rolled/kicked off to the side
3. Eyes and ears not following things in environment
4. No barking/no whining
5. Slow, calm breathing
6. Relaxed muscles

Cycle One is ...

The time from when you put your foot on the slack leash until your dog reaches the first Target Behavior. Time how long your dog stays in Target Behavior. Your dog will naturally come out of Target Behavior on their own. This could be anything from energetically popping up or gently raising their head.

Cycle Two is ...

The time from the end of Cycle One to when your dog reaches Target Behavior a second time. Your dog should stay in the second Target Behavior for half of the time they were in the first Target Behavior. When the timer is up, you can drop the leash if you are home or do a **Non-Energetic Release** if you are in public.

A Non-Energetic Release is like waking a sleeping baby. You want your dog to calmly come out of the Relaxation Down, not jolt awake. You can gently run your hand from their shoulders to their hips. It is fine and preferred if your dog chooses to stay relaxed after being released.

There is no set length of time for Relaxation Down. A Relaxation Down takes as long as it takes your dog to fully relax. You want to set aside a large window of time for your first few Relaxation Downs. It is common for it to take 1+ hours. Anxious and high energy dogs take longer in the beginning, but they need the benefits of this exercise the most.

Things to Remember

- This should be a safe exercise if you follow the rules. Only do this with a dog you feel safe handling.
- You **cannot give treats** to your dog during the exercise.
- Never push down on the leash to start the exercise. The leash might get tight because your dog moves around, and that's okay.
- The leash should be just long enough to have a little slack when your dog is standing right next to you, but no more.
- Ignore your dog's behavior the whole time. **Don't touch, look at, or talk to your dog.** No corrections (except if they chew the leash) and no rewards.
- If the leash gets tight while your dog is lying down, lift your foot to release the tension. Your dog should not feel the leash pulling while lying down.
- If your dog gets up, shorten the leash to the original length if they are near you. Otherwise, leave it as it is.
- If your dog falls asleep, the exercise is complete.
- Jack-in-the-box behavior is normal. Your dog might lay down and bounce up multiple times.

Ready for a Challenge?

- If your dog can do a Relaxation Down in under 20 minutes, it's time to try something harder!
- You can tether your dog to a heavy piece of furniture and sit across the room.
- You can try it outside: back yard or front porch.
- If you are feeling extra motivated, try it at a park.

Final Thoughts on the Use and Training of the Relaxation Down

- Relaxation Downs are not a stress-free way of learning, arguably nothing is. It is an important part of the exercise for your dog to **learn how to calm themselves down when stressed** and let go of unproductive energy.
- Start this exercise in an easy place for your dog. If they relax too easily (2 cycles in under 20 minutes), move to a slightly more challenging place.
- The first few times might take a long time, even over an hour. **Don't give up; it will get better.** The longer this exercise takes the more your dog needs it and will benefit from it.
- They will become easier and more comfortable for your dog with practice. The goal is for your dog to relax on their own in situations they couldn't before.