



Teach a Dog to Stay – 11 Step Repetition Blueprint

Presented by KenneLTrainer.Com

Teaching your dog to stay is often one of the first steps with a new dog – and for good reason. This basic cue can help you keep your dog safe, prevent her from “mugging” people for food, and keep her from getting underfoot while you cool.

At the same time, teaching a dog to stay is often quite difficult. From the human perspective, “stay” is an easy concept. Yet for many dogs, it’s hard to grasp exactly what the absence of behavior is. Are they allowed to blink? To lower their heads? To roll onto a hip? To sit up?

Don’t Teach a Dog to Stay without a Definition First

Defining exactly what you want your dog’s stay to look like will help you move more quickly. Personally, I use two different cues for two different “flavors” of stay:

1. Stay means do not move from the position I leave you in (generally lying down) until I come back to you. For my dog, stay does not allow for sitting up or lying down if I left him in the other position. However, he is allowed to lower his head or roll onto a hip if that’s more comfortable for him. I use this when I want my dog to stay put for a long time or in a distracting environment.
2. Wait means stay where you are, generally in a standing position, until I release you with the word “Ok.” I use this for shorter durations, such as waiting at crosswalks or waiting at the door when guests are coming in.

Many other trainers will also use a “formal stay” of some sort if they compete in obedience or ring-type sports. This “formal stay” is even stricter than my stay. Generally, the dog is to lie down square, in “sphinx position” with the head up and oriented towards the handler. This “formal stay” is not very practical in most real-life situations because it’s so intense for the dog, so I don’t use it.

It might seem superfluous to have two different cues, but it actually makes the training easier for me and my clients. No matter what you decide, it’s important to define exactly what is and is not allowed for your dog while staying. Specific criteria will actually be easier for her to learn than vague goals.

If you're stuck, just use my definition of stay: the dog stays in the physical location you left her in the position you left her, though weight shifts, head lowers, and other minor movements are allowed.

The Three D's of Teaching a Dog to Stay

Ready to get to training? Let's discuss the basic components teaching a dog to stay, which trainers call the Three D's:

1. **Duration:** How long can your dog stay put?
2. **Distraction:** Can your dog stay put even in a highly distracting environment such as a barbeque or coffee shop?
3. **Distance:** Can your dog stay put even if you're out of sight or across a football field?

When teaching your dog to stay, it's important to train each of these aspects individually. That means that if you're working on teaching your dog to stay in a new environment like a playground, it's not a good time to see if she can do a 5-minute stay instead of her usual 4 minutes.

Whenever you raise one criteria, you should lower the others at first. Think of your dog's skills as a finite amount of water, and the Three D's are three different flasks. If you pour all of your dog's skills into the "distraction" bucket, her skills in distance and duration are likely to falter. As you train, you'll add more water to your dog's stay skills.

You can slowly bring all the criteria up until your dog can stay put for 10 minutes at a backyard barbeque while you head inside for a bathroom break. But we're not there yet.

A Training Plan for Teaching Your Dog to Stay

When I teach a dog to stay, I find a checklist incredibly helpful. This helps keep my clients (and me) away from pushing our dogs too far, too fast.

Start out focusing on your dog's duration stay. Without duration, it's basically impossible to increase distance or allow your dog to notice a distraction.

You can take this training plan day by day, or you might need to slow down or speed up depending on your dog's skills. Each training session should just be a few minutes long. I often fit in training sessions while I microwave food, wait for water to boil, or am on the phone.

Here are a few basic rules for this training plan:

1. Start out by telling your dog to [sit](#) or [lie down](#).

2. Feed your dog in the position that she's in so she doesn't get up, unless the training plan says "take a break" in which case you will say "Ok" and toss a treat away from your dog so that she has to stand up and go get it. This helps to teach your dog when it's ok to break her stay.
3. Each bullet point is a step in the plan. When your dog completes that task, reward her with a treat as described above.
4. If your dog ever gets up during a training plan, simply put her back in a stay and start again at the beginning of the session.
5. If she gets up multiple times, just call it for the day and start again later. No need to make a fuss about it, and punishment won't help!
6. You need to use treats in this training plan. Think of it as your dog's paycheck for learning a difficult behavior!
7. Many dogs find it easier to learn to stay on a towel or platform. If you wish to use a prop to make it easier for your dog, please do so!



Dog stays on a dock and waits for owner's cue.

You do not have to say the word stay at first. See our article on [adding cues](#) to learn more about that. This plan also purposefully goes from easy to hard to easy again during each session, helping keep you and your dog encouraged and engaged.

At the end of this training plan, your dog will be able to stay for five minutes while you walk away from her in a calm environment. Always use a leash as backup if your dog is not contained.

Session One: The Basics

- One second.
- Two seconds.
- One second.
- Three seconds.
- One second while you twist your torso once.
- Three seconds.
- Two seconds while you shift your weight from one foot to another.
- Two seconds.
- Four seconds.
- Three seconds while you lift your arms straight out from your shoulders, then lower them.
- Two seconds.
- Five seconds.
- Four seconds while you twist your torso.
- Three seconds while you pick up one foot, then put it back down.
- Three seconds.
- Two seconds.

Session Two: Up to 15 Seconds

- Two seconds.
- Five seconds.
- Three seconds.
- Seven seconds.
- Three seconds.
- Nine seconds.
- Four seconds.
- Ten seconds.
- Three seconds.
- Seven seconds.
- Twelve seconds.
- Five seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.
- Eight seconds.
- Five seconds.

Session Three: Turn Your Back

- Four seconds while you twist your torso.
- Seven seconds.
- Five seconds while you shift your weight from one foot to the other.
- Six seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.
- Eight seconds while you quietly pat your knees with your hands.
- Seven seconds while you pick up your foot and put it back down
- Five seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.
- Ten seconds while you turn to look over your shoulder.
- Six seconds while you bend deeply at the knees.
- Seven seconds.
- Four seconds while you turn halfway around to face the side and return.
- Five seconds.
- Four seconds while you turn halfway to face the other side and return.
- Five seconds while you turn 360 degrees.
- Ten seconds.
- Five seconds.

Session Four: Three Steps Away

- Seven seconds.
- Ten seconds while you look over your shoulder.
- Six seconds while you take a small step backwards and return.
- Seven seconds.
- Eight seconds while you rock your weight forward and backward with small foot movements.
- Four seconds while you take one step back.
- Ten seconds.
- Five seconds while you take two steps back.
- Eight seconds.
- Five seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take one step.
- Eight seconds.
- Five seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take two steps.
- Eight seconds.
- Five seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take three steps.
- Fifteen seconds.
- Five seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take one step.

Session Five: Five Steps Away

- Nine seconds.
- Twelve seconds while you look over your shoulder.
- Eight seconds while you take one step backwards and return.
- Nine seconds.

- Ten seconds while you rock your weight forward and backward with small foot movements.
- Six seconds while you take two steps back.
- Twelve seconds.
- Seven seconds while you take four steps back.
- Ten seconds.
- Seven seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take five steps.
- Ten seconds.
- Seven seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take four steps.
- Eight seconds.
- Seven seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take four steps.
- Twenty seconds.
- Five seconds while you turn your back on your dog and take two steps.

Session Six: Up to One Minute

- Twelve seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.
- Twenty seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds.
- Forty seconds.
- Twenty seconds.
- Forty seconds.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twelve seconds.
- Fifty seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.
- One minute
- Fifteen seconds.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds.

Session Seven: Out of Sight

Note: set your dog up within five steps door for this session.

- Twelve seconds.
- Fifteen seconds while you turn and take two steps away.
- Twenty seconds while you turn and take one step away.
- Fifteen seconds while you walk in a circle around your dog.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds while you take three steps towards a door.
- Forty seconds.
- Twenty seconds while you take four steps towards a door.
- Forty seconds.
- Thirty seconds while you step halfway through the door.

- Twelve seconds.
- Fifty seconds.
- Fifteen seconds while you step all the way through the door and immediately return.
- One minute
- Fifteen seconds while you disappear from sight and return.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds.

Session Eight: Adding Distance

Note: set your dog up in either the biggest room or longest hallway in your house.

- Twelve seconds.
- Fifteen seconds while you take two steps away.
- Twenty seconds while you take five steps away.
- Fifteen seconds while you take three steps away.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds while you take eight steps away.
- Forty seconds.
- Twenty seconds while you take ten steps away.
- Forty seconds while you take two steps away.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twelve seconds while you take twelve steps away.
- Fifty seconds.
- Fifteen seconds while you skip back and forth near the dog.
- One minute
- Fifteen seconds while you walk in circles around the dog.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds while you take four steps away.

Session Nine: Up to Three Minutes

- Thirty seconds.
- Forty seconds.
- Twenty seconds.
- One minute.
- Fifty seconds.
- One minute ten seconds.
- Forty seconds.
- One minute forty seconds.
- Forty seconds.
- Two minutes.
- Forty seconds.
- Two minutes thirty seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.

- One minute.
- Three minutes.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds.

Session Ten: Up to Five Minutes

- Forty seconds.
- One minute.
- Fifty seconds.
- Two minutes.
- Forty seconds.
- Two minutes.
- One minute.
- Three minutes.
- Forty seconds.
- Five minutes.
- Fifteen seconds.
- Four minutes
- Ten seconds.
- One minute.
- Twenty seconds.

Session Eleven: Distance + Duration

- Thirty seconds.
- Forty seconds while you take two steps away.
- Twenty seconds.
- One minute while you take five steps away.
- Fifty seconds.
- One minute ten seconds.
- Forty seconds while you take eight steps away.
- One minute forty seconds.
- Forty seconds while you skip back and forth near the dog.
- Two minutes while you walk in circles around the dog.
- Forty seconds while you take three steps away.
- Two minutes thirty seconds.
- Fifteen seconds.
- One minute while you take two steps away.
- Three minutes while you take ten steps away.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twenty seconds while you take twelve steps away.
- Thirty seconds.
- Twelve seconds.

Beyond Session Eleven: Take it on the Road

If your dog is still doing well at session eleven, it's time to hit the road to practice your dog's stay.

Start over again at session two or three and go through the sequence again in a variety of situations. Remember to keep your dog on leash during training, just in case! Here are some ideas for adding distractions to your dog's stay.

Practice:

- While you have guests over or people are cooking.
- In your backyard on a quiet evening.
- In your front yard while people, cars, and dogs go by at an easy distance.
- At a public park while kids are playing.
- On the patio of a coffee shop or dog-friendly bar.

It looks like a lot but teaching your dog to stay can be really easy if you follow this checklist. Be patient if your dog is struggling and just keep making it easier until she can succeed.



Kayla Fratt

Head trainer and owner of Journey Dog Training.