

Teaching ‘Stay’ and ‘Wait’

Stay and Wait are two different behaviors. Stay means asking your dog to stay in a fixed position and not move until you release them. Wait is less strict and is essentially asking your dog to wait behind an imaginary line or threshold until you release them. With ‘wait’ your dog’s position doesn’t matter, as long as they don’t cross the line.

Stay

‘Stay’ must be broken down into several steps in order to be reliable. The most common mistake made is when owners ask their dog to stay, taking several steps back, and then call the dog to them to get the treat. Remember how important it is to reward for the right behavior at the right time, so you must always walk back to the dog to treat the stay and release them only after this is done.

1. First, ask your dog to ‘sit.’ Briefly show your dog the hand signal for stay (flat hand out like a stop signal) and then put your hand away. Leaving your hand out can lead to your dog relying on this in the future.
Don’t take any steps back at first! In the beginning, you need to work on building time before adding distance in order to create a reliable stay.
2. After showing your dog the hand signal, count in your head to three. Then mark the behavior with a click or “yes” and give your dog a treat. Some dogs may need to start with even less time to get the hang of keeping their bottom down.
3. Once you treat your dog for the stay, count two seconds and then give them your release word. If your dog pops out of the stay before you release them, tell him “uh uh” and guide them back into the position so that you can release them properly.
4. Gradually increase the time that you are asking them to stay. It is also a good idea to leapfrog between harder and easier repeats, to give your dog “easy” repeats (1-2 seconds) part of the time and then harder repeats mixed in (5+ seconds). Remember to do this throughout training. Periodically throw in an easy repetition to keep them interested, build off of their success and avoid discouraging them.
5. Add the verbal cue for ‘stay’ once your dog is consistent. Then work your way up to at least 10 seconds before adding any distance. When you are ready to add distance, you will add it one step at a time. Always make sure to walk back to your dog to treat them.
6. Once you start to add distance, practice on a long leash line. This is good insurance in case your dog breaks their stay. If they are on a long line, they can’t run off.

Wait

'Wait' is asking your dog to remain behind an imaginary line or threshold no matter what position he is in. This is helpful to keep your dog from bolting out of an open door, jumping out of the car before you have had time to gather your things, and even for meal times to teach impulse control.

1. Put your dog on leash and pick an easy threshold in the house to practice at (one that you can easily block if needed).
2. Get a handful of high value treats and approach the line. Stand on the line facing your dog and give them the hand signal for 'wait' (two fingers waved left and right).
3. Slowly turn to the side, opening a path through the threshold. If your dog goes to run through, step in front of them and show them the hand signal again.
4. Once you are able to turn to the side and your dog doesn't try to run through, click or say "yes" and give them a treat. Then, you can release them through the line using your release cue.
5. After some repetitions of this, you can begin adding the word "wait" when you give your dog the hand signal. Improve on this by using different doorways or thresholds, in the car, and at meal times to get it solid

Good luck and happy wags from the AAA team!