

Greyhounds: Basic Commands & Training

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Importance of training

Dog training should be fun for you and your greyhound. Everyone likes a well behaved and socialised dog and providing some basic training will help equip your greyhound to adjust to his life after racing and know what is expected of him in his new home.

Positive training techniques

Positive training works by rewarding our dogs for the behaviours we want and ignoring or preventing the behaviours we don't want. By rewarding our dogs as soon as they perform the required behaviour (such as 'Down'), we are letting them know they have performed the correct action and giving them a reason to repeat the behaviour next time we ask for it.

Greyhounds are a sensitive breed and do not respond well to punishment. Using aversive training techniques such as shouting, physical punishment, or using rattle cans, will not teach your dog what you want him to do. It is more likely to make your dog fearful and cause other behaviour problems.

Using rewards in training

When you start teaching your dog, you need to reward him as soon as he has performed the required action. The type of rewards you use need to be something your dog really wants. This will vary from dog to dog and rewards can include food, praise, gentle petting and games with toys.

For most greyhounds food rewards work very well. Small pieces of food that are moist, soft and smelly, such as cooked chicken, cheese, meaty strips, frankfurter and sausage are ideal. The rewards need to be easy to handle and about the size of a large pea so they can be delivered and eaten quickly.

Remember, in the initial stages of training you will reward your dog every time he performs the behaviour. Once you are sure your dog knows and understands what you're asking him to do you can start rewarding intermittently, for example 3 times out of 10.

Before you start your training

You will need:

- A flat, comfortable lead (*leather or soft webbing*)
- A leather greyhound collar (*'fish tail' shape collar for greyhounds*) or **greyhound martingale collar**
- A **muzzle** (the plastic box type for greyhounds)
- **Small, high value treats** (the size of a large pea)
- A **quiet area, without any distractions, to train in**

Training tip:

Remember to keep training sessions short and fun. Several 5-10 minute sessions a day will be more beneficial than one long session – for you and your dog.

Attention building and focus

Just like us, dogs can only really learn when they're paying attention and focused on the teacher.

Teaching your greyhound to pay attention to you is an important part of early training and can be achieved quite easily. The aim of the attention building exercise is to teach your dog to make eye contact with you and hold your gaze.

To begin, make sure that your dog is in front of you and that you have a handful of food rewards.

1. Let your dog see that you have the food rewards. Close your hand around the rewards and hold your arm out horizontally by your side. Your dog is likely to keep staring at the hand with the rewards and may even bark or whine to get to the food. Ignore this and keep your eyes on your dog.

2. Usually after 4 – 10 seconds, your dog will look at



your face or eyes. Say 'yes' and praise your dog while giving a food reward.

3. Stand still and repeat the exercise again. You should find after three or four repetitions your dog automatically starts to look at your face and into your eyes. Say 'yes' each time and praise and reward your dog.

4. Gradually build on the length of time you can hold your dog's gaze, praising and rewarding each time.

Training tip:

You do not need to make this exercise into a verbal command. If you train and practise it frequently your dog will automatically want to make eye contact with you, rather than just making eye contact when you ask him to.

Leave it!

'Leave it' is a very useful command for all dogs to know. It means leave that item, ignore it and pay attention to me. It has many practical uses for all dogs, especially when it comes to things like cat training or preventing counter-surfing (stealing food).



Training 'leave it'

1. Show your dog you have a tasty food reward in your hand. Hold the food firmly between your thumb and forefinger, so only a little bit is poking out and say 'leave it'. Your dog is likely to try to get to the food by licking, nibbling or pawing at your hand. Ignore this and keep your hand still.

2. The moment your dog takes his nose away from your hand, even if for a

second, feed him a food reward from your other hand.

3. Practise and repeat until your dog automatically takes his head away and doesn't look at the food in your hand.

4. Once you are sure your dog knows the 'leave it' command, you can start applying it to other objects you want your dog to ignore, remembering to praise your dog and reward him every time he leaves a new object.

Training tip:

Remember to only say 'leave it' once each time you practise and wait for your dog to move his head away before rewarding.

Stay

Stay is an invaluable and practical command. It can be used so that your dog waits by the door, doesn't jump out of the car boot before you release him and stays on his bed or mat while you eat your dinner.

Training the stay

Make sure you have plenty of food rewards and that you start your training in a place with no distractions.

1. Ensure you have your dog's attention and with your dog straight in front of you, say 'stay' and give your hand signal for 'stay' (hand held up with flat of your palm facing the dog). Reward almost immediately if the dog stays still. Repeat this a couple of times. Reward after one second of stillness, then work up to a count to two, then praise and reward your dog for not moving each time.
2. Gradually build up the length of time your dog will stay directly in front of you, rewarding each time.
3. Once your dog is reliably remaining in the 'stay position' directly in front of you, you can then start adding in some distance. Give your stay command and then step one foot backwards. Step back to your dog and reward. If your dog moves, repeat but step away more slowly, or reduce the size of your step backwards.
4. Repeat over several sessions, gradually building up the distance from your dog until you can move further away and circle him. Remember to step back to your dog each time and praise and reward.

5. Do not be tempted to call your dog out of the stay while your dog is learning this command. This helps ensure that your dog builds a solid stay, otherwise you will be rewarding him for the release and not staying still.

Training tip:

Don't be tempted to rush your training for 'stay'. Work on one element at a time such as the length of time, distance away from your dog, or level of distractions, before combining all three.

Come when called

If you want to let your dog off the lead, it is essential that he has a strong recall and will come back to you when he is called. As greyhounds are sight hounds, they can be distracted by movement and things we may not be able to see.

Never let your greyhound off in a public place, unless you are 100% sure that they will return to you when called. Always use a muzzle when you first let your dog off the lead. Do not start this training exercise until you are certain that you have mastered 'stay' and 'leave it' commands.

Training the recall

To begin training the recall, you will need a helper, plenty of food rewards and a quiet environment to train in. If a helper is not available, a long line can be used to encourage your dog to come to you.

1. Ask your helper to hold your dog. Stand in front of your dog and show him you have a tasty food treat, or toy, that he may want. Walk five paces backwards and call your dog using the 'come' command.
2. As soon as your dog comes to you, slip two fingers under his collar, praise him and feed him the food reward.
3. Gradually increase the distance from your dog when you call, ensuring you always praise and reward him for coming to you.
4. Once your dog is reliably coming to you in an

environment without distractions, start practising in more difficult and distracting places such as the garden, or a quiet corner of a park. Remember you will need to reduce the distance slightly each time you start in a new environment.

Using a long line

A long line is a very long lead, usually made of soft webbing, which attaches to the dog's harness. Generally, a long line comes in lengths of five to ten metres and provides the dog with some freedom, whilst remaining under your control. It is useful if you don't have someone to help you with your training and particularly when you start to practise recall in more distracting environments.

As greyhounds can accelerate up to speeds of 40 mph in a matter of seconds, it is advisable to use a long line in conjunction with a harness rather than a neck collar to prevent neck injury.

Training tip:

Slipping two fingers under the collar when your dog comes to you and before you feed the treat, gets your dog used to having his collar felt when he comes to you. This will prevent him from running off, meaning you can clip the lead back on when you need to.

If you find that your dog isn't responding in a training session or appears to have forgotten what he has learned, take a short break and resume the training later. If your dog was responding well before, it may be that you have jumped too far ahead with the training. For example, if your dog was able to stay for five seconds and next time, you increased the time to ten seconds and your dog moved, it means that you need to reduce the time back to five seconds and gradually increase the time rather than jumping ahead.

Many greyhounds and their owners enjoy participating in dog sports such as agility and competitive obedience. If you are interested in finding out more contact the Kennel Club at www.kennelclub.org.uk.

Basic dog training can make a difference and help a greyhound adjust to life in a new home. This leaflet gives valuable hints and easy to follow training tips.



For further information or guidance please contact:

- **Retired Greyhound Trust Welfare Helpline**
020 8335 3016
(open M-F 10-11am)
- **Local Retired Greyhound Trust Branches**
www.retiredgreyhounds.co.uk/branches
- **Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors**
www.apbc.org.uk
- **The Association of Pet Dog Trainers**
www.apdt.co.uk



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Although within that context every effort has been made by the Retired Greyhound Trust to ensure that the detail set out in this booklet is accurate, the Trust does not accept any liability for the contents of this leaflet or for the consequences of any action taken on the basis of the information provided. Any person taking on the responsibilities of ownership of a greyhound is strongly advised to seek formal advice on their behaviour and behavioural tendencies.