

B-7 TIER 2: PROTOCOL FOR DESENSITIZING AND COUNTERCONDITIONING DOGS TO RELINQUISH OBJECTS

Some dogs have difficulty relinquishing objects about which they care. These can range from objects such as bones, whose value people can generally appreciate, to illogical objects such as seeds harvested outside and brought into the house. All dogs should be able to relinquish possessions of any kind to their people on request. Not only is this a sign that they are willing to be deferential to their people, but also it is a behavior that could save their life some day if the object that they are so fiercely protecting can hurt them.

The point of this protocol is to teach the dog to relinquish any object to its person *on request*. If you cannot teach the dog to willingly relinquish one class of objects—and this may happen if those objects are bones—it would be far preferable to omit these from the dog's repertoire forever. Remember, the goals of this program are twofold: by decreasing the dog's anxiety if it is inappropriately protecting an object, it is hoped that the dog will learn to relax and be less anxious when presented with the object, and, finally, minimization of any danger to any person who may come in contact with the dog when it is protecting the object, regardless of whether the person thinks that such protection is rational. When dogs learn to behave appropriately, they become safer.

Before starting this tier of the behavior modification programs, all dogs should have successfully completed "Protocol for Deference: Basic Program" and "Protocol for Relaxation: Behavior Modification Tier 1." To begin the tasks in this protocol, select an object in which the dog has no interest—a paperweight or a rock from outdoors. The object should have *no value to the dog* and certainly should not frighten the dog. Ask the dog to sit and stay or to lie down and stay, and relax, and then place the object about 2 to 3 meters from the dog so that the dog can see the object. Reward the dog for relaxing. Instruct the dog to stay; then pick up and quickly return the object. Return to the dog and reward the dog if it relaxed and did not move. Continue to pick up and replace the object, moving it progressively closer to the dog in a gradual manner. Each time you pick up and replace the object, remember to return to the dog and reward the dog if it ignored the movement of the object and relaxed (see the following task sheets). If at any point the dog picks up the object, ask the dog to drop it. This is a command that all puppies should learn, and you can use this protocol to teach it. If the dog drops the object, tell the dog that it was good, but do not reward it with a food treat. After this, ask the dog to wait or stay for 5 to 10 seconds; if it does so, reward the dog with a food treat. If the dog does not drop the object after a second request, you can either isolate the dog or leave the room.

Dog's Task

The dog should sit, stay, and relax when:

- The object is placed on the floor 3 meters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
- The object is placed on the floor 2.5 meters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
- The object is placed on the floor 2 meters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
- The object is placed on the floor 1.5 meters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
- The object is placed on the floor 1 meter away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object

If you leave the room you have denied the dog both your attention and control of the situation. The dog will ultimately seek you out. When it does, ask the dog to sit, request that it wait, and pursue some exercises from Tier 1. Then start with the tasks in this protocol again.

Isolating the dog may be difficult if the dog also has any aggressions toward you. Aggressions involving possession often coexist with other aggressions that may involve people. Alternatively, you can use a Gentle Leader/Promise System Canine Head Collar when you work with the dog. If the dog does grab the object, you can safely interrupt the theft in the act and reinforce the dog's relaxation. If you are concerned about your ability to take an object directly from the dog, you should use a head collar for the first round of these exercises.

After the dog is able to sit quietly and relax, even if the object is removed from directly in front of it, select a different item with which to work with the dog. The next object should be one about which the dog cares slightly more. Repeat the entire protocol as listed in the following task pages. Continue to repeat all of the tasks, sequentially selecting an item that is progressively more interesting to the dog.

Finally, if your dog is able to complete the entire protocol and appear relaxed and happy when you pick up even the most valued of its items, you may wish to start "take it—drop it." This is another exercise that all puppies should learn. Start with objects in which the dogs have a mild interest (a broken squeak toy) and proceed to objects in which the dog has a keen interest (a rope toy or plush dog toy). Consider using rawhides or real bones *if and only if* your dog is not aggressive around food. It is ideal to start puppies by teaching them to relinquish rawhides, but if you begin to have problems with aggression, talk to your veterinarian. It is always safer to deny rawhides and real bones to dogs that have the potential for problem behaviors. The dogs will not be deprived if you do so.

Finally, remember all of the work that you emphasized in Tier 1 of the protocols. Use body language cues to tell whether the dog is relaxed or distressed. Distressed dogs cannot learn or focus and may shake, tremble, whine, salivate, move their eyes from side to side, pull the corners of their lips horizontally backward, and so on. Remember, for these protocols to work best, it is not sufficient that the dog is just sitting and staying. The dog must be relaxed while doing this. Dogs that can learn to enjoy the exercises will progress at the fastest rate. As for the other protocols, if at any point the dog continues to have difficulty with the tasks, divide them into smaller units and continue. If the dog works best for three 5-minute periods instead of one 15-minute period, do the former first and then work up to the latter.

Comments about response or difficulty

The object is placed on the floor 0.5 meters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
 The object is placed on the floor 0.25 meters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
 The object is placed on the floor 10 centimeters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
 The object is placed on the floor 5 centimeters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
 The object is placed on the floor 2 centimeters away from the dog; briefly retrieve and replace the object
 The object is placed on the floor, touching the dog's feet; briefly retrieve and replace the object

For Future Repetitions

- Repeat all tasks in different locations.
- Repeat all tasks with all family members.
- Repeat all tasks with only every second or third task being rewarded with a treat. (Remember praise!)
- Repeat with only intermittent treat reinforcement. (Remember praise!)

Advanced Section (And For Puppies)

Have the dog sit and relax while you hold out an object in which the dog is interested and do the following:

Dog's Task

Put the object in the dog's mouth or, if the dog will take the object itself, offer it with the request to take it and let the dog hold it for 1 second, then repeat above
 Put the object in the dog's mouth or, if the dog will take the object itself, offer it with the request to take it and let the dog hold it for 1 second, then repeat above
 Put the object in the dog's mouth or, if the dog will take the object itself, offer it with the request to take it and let the dog hold it for 2 seconds, then repeat above
 Put the object in the dog's mouth or, if the dog will take the object itself, offer it with the request to take it and let the dog hold it for 3 seconds, then repeat above
 Put the object in the dog's mouth or, if the dog will take the object itself, offer it with the request to take it and let the dog hold it for 4 seconds, then repeat above
 Put the object in the dog's mouth or, if the dog will take the object itself, offer it with the request to take it and let the dog hold it for 5 seconds, then repeat above

Repeat the previous exercises with progressively more fascinating (for the dog) objects.

Ultimately, you should be able to request that the dog take and drop virtually anything.

Antianxiety medications may help some dogs that other-

Put the object directly under the dog's nose or gently in its mouth and say, "Take it"; before the object can be fully grasped say, "Good boy (girl)!" and then say, "Drop it"; reward the dog for allowing you to take the object, although the dog never truly held it. Gradually advance to letting the dog hold the object for, at first, a very short time. Reward the dog with praise or a tiny treat when it responds to "drop it." Slowly increase the amount of time that the dog can have the object before you request that the dog drop it.

Comments about response or difficulty

wise are unable to succeed in this program. Remember, if it is decided that medication could benefit your dog, you need to use it *in addition* to the behavior modification, not instead of it.