



True North Training

Ask The Trainer: Canines Choosing To Be Calm

QUESTION:

I am having trouble getting my adopted shelter dog to calm down! He's a Labrador-border collie mix and he just never seems to stop moving! He was very calm when we brought him home, but now he keeps getting into trouble. Can you help us?

ANSWER:

Congratulations on your new adoptee! I expect by now you are beginning to wonder whether you'll ever get a moment's rest, and I promise you – it WILL happen. This is a mix of two very active dog breeds, but what I'm going to share is important for all dog owners, because the dog will almost always have more energy than you do, especially if you have a younger puppy.

First of all, you need to assess how much time your dog is spending by himself. If he is home alone or crated for significant periods of time, this will increase his need for just plain exercise, and of course, he'll need it when you walk in the door after work. Like anyone else, a dog needs sufficient exercise for his body AND his mind, and you will have to provide that for him!

The physical exercise part in some ways is simplest – your dog needs to get outside and move his body! Try to find games you can play that will get your dog running and chasing (things dogs like to do in play anyway). Your dog may enjoy retrieving a ball or a Frisbee, swimming in a lake, running around and playing with other dogs if he is well-socialized, and with you as well. Some dogs really enjoy a rousing game of tug (make sure you teach your dog the rules: YOU start the game, YOU end the game, and in most cases, YOU end up with the toy!). If your

For more information, please visit our website at www.truenorthtraining.biz or "Like" us on [Facebook](#)

The information included in this Education Series is reliable but not guaranteed. It is for informational purposes only and True North Training assumes no liability for its use. No alterations may be made to this material without permission from True North Training and the document must be reproduced in its entirety.

dog is in good shape for running, you can take your dog on a run with you. Note that you should NOT take a pup out running until she is **at least** 8 months old, and even then, you should plan on no longer than 1 or 2 miles and at a slow pace. The larger the breed, the longer they take to become physically mature, so be aware that 8 months is a minimum age for becoming your jogging partner! Whatever works to get your dog out and exercised is a good thing and will help his level of calmness around the house.

But your dog needs his mind exercised as well, and that is generally accomplished through training. The best thing for any new dog is to learn some new training exercises and to create some new neural pathways in his brain. In addition, the time you spend training your dog helps both you AND the dog to learn how to communicate effectively, which of course is great for building your relationship with him. As you train, use lots of positive reinforcement, and give your dog loads of information about what you WANT him to do. Think of your training project as being similar to that Warmer/Colder game you used to play when you were a kid – you could make the game harder for older players by very **gradually** having whoever was “It” find the desired object or action, and by choosing more difficult tasks for them to figure out – or, for example, you could make it much easier for younger children by doing things like standing near the light switch they were supposed to turn on, or by asking for much simpler actions (touch your toes). Think of your dog, to begin with, like one of the younger children in the game and make things really easy for him. As he gets better, you can increase the difficulty of what he is learning.

In any case, ALL of the training uses problem solving and thinking functions in your pet’s brain, and just like when you are studying for a big exam or writing a paper – even though you are not doing something that is physically demanding, it still wears you out!

Finally, it’s important for dogs to learn some self-discipline and coping skills for down time just as it is for all of us. Good Manners are always welcome in social interactions, and your dog should be taught some! For example, teaching your dog to sit before doing anything she wants to do is a great first step to take in training. Think of it as if you were teaching a young child to say “Please” before getting what he wants. For one thing, it’s cuter than anything when they learn to do it, and for another, it’s just polite and shows a positive deference to you around the house and when you are out and about. Your dog should sit before going through doorways, before getting her dinner, before getting treats, before you throw a favorite fetch toy, before jumping in the back of the car for a little ride around the neighborhood, before ...well, you get the idea. Once the dog has learned to do this behavior reliably, you can increase the amount of time she must remain sitting in order to get what she wants. For example, you could ask your dog to sit and stay while you put her bowl on the floor and step

back away from it. Or have her sit on one side of the door while you open it, step across the threshold, and then allow her to come through after you. When she gets REALLY good at this behavior, you can ask her to sit and wait while you throw the ball for her, until you tell her to go get it – or, even a few notches up from there, have her sit and wait while you throw the ball for ANOTHER dog, who runs to get it and bring it back. In any case, sitting down and being polite is a behavior that is never unappreciated by others you meet with your dog – so it's a great default behavior for public and social settings.

The second thing you want to teach your dog is to lie down and occupy himself with a chew toy. I think of it as a “please wait quietly – the grownups are talking” kind of behavior. This is pretty easy to teach as well, simply by taking out the chew toy, setting it on the floor for the dog, and then shortening up the leash so the dog really has no place else to go. Then, you just ignore the dog. Even a busy dog will eventually stop trying to walk away, lie down, and start engaging with the chew toy you have provided. You can sweeten this experience by getting some natural peanut butter (low sugar) and swiping some on the inside of a chew toy or treated beef bone, so the dog has something to work at while he's lying down and being quiet. If you do this fairly regularly in the dog's schedule, the dog will learn that when he's on leash and you give him the chew toy and tell him to lie down, that is a signal that things are going to be kind of boring for him for a while, and he should direct all his excess energy towards chewing, or just take that time to rest up until you are ready to engage with him again.

Your active dog can also be helped to relax around the house using aromatherapy (talk to a naturopathic veterinarian to learn which scents seem to provide relaxation and calmness) and canine pheromones (DAP – available from pet stores and veterinary clinics). This also engages his brain with scent that is not in the ordinary run of his usual life, and aromatherapy/essential oils just make your house smell nicer, too! The canine pheromones are undetectable by humans, so don't worry about that!

And finally, there are loads of interactive toys on the market now that can keep your dog engaged and busy for pretty lengthy periods of time. These kinds of toys are puzzles that the dog must solve in order to get at the treats that are enclosed inside the toy. Some are harder than others and require some training input from the handler (they come with directions as to how to teach the dog to interact with the toy, or you can bring the toy to a dog training class or trainer who will show you how to do that). Others (like the ubiquitous Kong toy) are pretty self-explanatory, even for the dog – there's a hole in each end and you can stuff it with food which the dog can then work at getting out of it.

All in all, there are loads of ways to help an active, busy dog learn to settle down. At True North, we'll be happy to help you train a dog you can live with! Call us: 651.277.9663, or send an email to animaltrainer777@gmail.com.

