

1

Getting Ready



If you're like most kids who have a dog, the two of you have a comfy routine by now. You feed your dog, you walk him or let him out in the yard, you toss his favorite toy when he drops it at your feet. He's always there when you come home, he hangs out with you and your friends, and he sleeps in your room. It's all good. But you know what? It could be way more.

This book is full of ideas for things dogs and kids can do together. And this chapter will show you how to get started. Like any new thing you try, there's some basic stuff to master before you jump in. Once you've got that down, let the fun and games begin!

Socializing Your Dog

Do you think you'd have fun at a party if you'd never played with other kids before? Probably not. More likely, you'd just feel nervous. You'd also feel kind of nervous if you'd never been to a party before, or even away from your home.



Your dog will feel the same way if he never goes to new places and doesn't know how to act around other dogs or new people. So if you think it might be fun to take him to new places and introduce him to new dogs and people, you'll need to start by exposing him to other dogs, strangers, and unfamiliar places. This process of introducing a dog to new experiences is called *socialization*.

Meeting Other Dogs

The best way to get your dog used to being around other dogs is to let him have positive interactions with other pooches. If your dog is a puppy and he has all his shots, you can take him to a dog park to play. You can also ask your friends with well-behaved dogs to come over and visit for play dates.

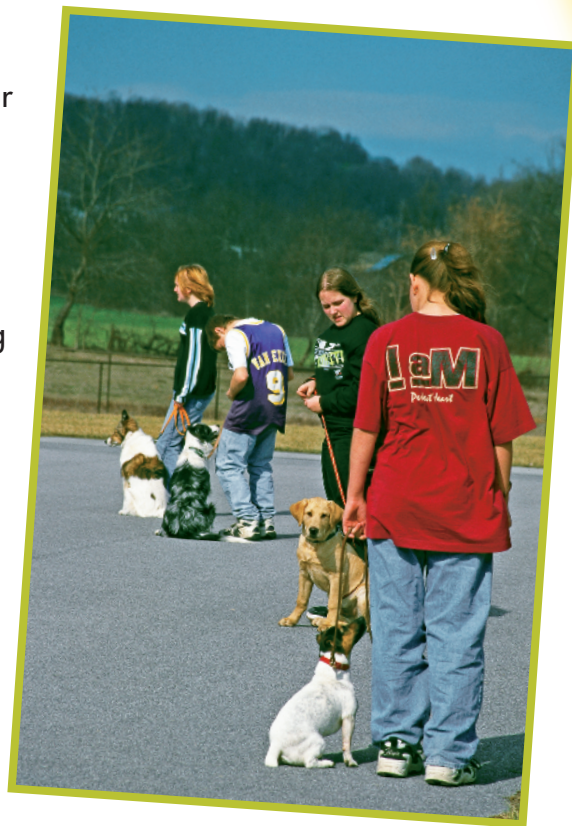
At first, invite only one friend with one dog at a time. This way, your dog has a chance to gradually get used to new dogs. Make sure all the dogs you invite are friendly toward other dogs, because not all dogs are. For instance, some dogs are uneasy around puppies, probably because they aren't used to the goofy way puppies act.

If your dog is all grown up, he may not like it if other dogs come into his territory. That's because a lot of dogs consider their home and yard to be their turf, and they want to protect it. Instead of having your friends come to your house, you can ask them to meet you at the park, as long as all the dogs are kept on a leash. You can also meet in a part of your neighborhood where your dog doesn't usually go for walks. Then he won't feel like it's his turf to protect.

Another great way to socialize your dog is to take him to a training class. Training will be fun for both you and your dog. If he's a puppy, you can enroll him in puppy kindergarten. If he's an adult dog, he can go to basic obedience classes or a home manners class. You can find out where classes are held in your area by contacting your local animal shelter, looking in the telephone directory, or checking on the Internet.

In class, your dog will learn to be comfortable around other dogs. He'll also learn to pay attention to you even when there's distracting stuff going on. And all this visiting will help him get used to going to unfamiliar places, too.

If your dog is nervous around other dogs, he needs some help learning to relax with members of his own species. Start by giving him treats when other dogs are around. Your dog will take his cue from you, so if you seem happy with other dogs, he'll know that everything is okay. If your dog is seriously a scaredy cat, your parents may need to hire a private trainer to give your pooch some lessons at home in confidence-building (see Association of Pet Dog Trainers in the resources section at the end of this book).



Meeting New People

For many of the fun activities in this book, your dog will be around people besides you and your family. So he needs to learn that unfamiliar people are nothing to fear.

It's best to start teaching your dog when he's a puppy that it's okay to be around strangers. Some people have puppy parties where they all sit in a circle and pass the puppy around. The puppy gets to meet all the different people in the circle. This is an excellent exercise for puppies because it helps them learn that all kinds of people make good friends.

If your dog is an adult and hasn't been around too many people in his life, he can start meeting some now. Have an adult help you with this part, just to make sure everyone stays safe. Take your dog to the park with some treats and walk around with him. If people notice your dog, ask them if they'd like to pet him and give him a treat. When strangers start feeding your dog treats, he'll quickly learn that meeting new people is a good thing. (Only practice this if your dog has never acted afraid of people or tried to bite anyone.)

You can also ask friends and relatives to come over to your house to meet your dog. When they arrive, they can give your dog his favorite treats and make a fuss over him. What could be better? If you do this often enough, your dog will start to catch on that having company is great.

Once your dog seems relaxed and happy around new dogs and people, he's ready for the next step—training.



Training Your Dog

Many of the great things you can do with your dog will be more fun for both of you if your dog has some training. A dog who's trained will listen to you when you ask him to do something. He'll turn his attention to you and will be nicer to be around.

Before you start training your dog, you need to teach yourself how to be a great dog trainer. Here are some important things to keep in mind.

- **Always be patient.** Don't get angry at your dog if he doesn't do what you ask. Remember that he's just learning. Keep trying until he understands.
- **Use rewards.** Treats, an upbeat tone of voice, and lots of praise and petting will help your dog learn faster. Giving praise and treats for making the right choice is called *reinforcing*. Reinforcement makes it more likely that your dog will repeat what he was doing when you praised him.
- **Be kind.** Never hit or yell at your dog if he makes a mistake.
- **Use treats wisely.** Find out what treats your dog likes best, and save those for training time. Whatever you give your dog, use very small pieces. Cut back on the amount of food he gets with his regular meals if you're giving him a lot of treats. You don't want him to start getting chubby.
- **Always end on a positive note.** When you're working with your dog, only stop your training session when your dog has done something right. This may mean asking him to do something he already knows how to do well. Ending each training session with success will help him learn faster.
- **Ask for help.** If you're stuck and your dog doesn't get it, ask a knowledgeable adult for help.



No matter what age they are, all dogs should know some basic skills. These are:

- Sit
- Down
- Come
- Stay
- Walk on a leash



Sit

It isn't difficult to teach your dog to sit when you ask him. And it's an important skill for him to know. It gives you more control over his behavior when you're doing just about any kind of activity. It's also a good idea to have him sit at every street corner when you're out walking and waiting for the light to change—for his safety and yours. Here's how to teach your dog to sit.

- Break up some of your dog's favorite treats into small, easy-to-swallow pieces. Put them in your pocket or on a table right next to where you're working.
- Get your dog to stand in front of you, facing you, with his toes close to yours. (You may need to scootch closer to him to make this happen.)
- Place a bit of food between your thumb and forefinger.
- Put the treat near your dog's nose to get his attention. Don't let him have it just yet, though.
- Slowly raise the treat up in the air. As your dog follows it with his nose, move it back over his head a few inches.
- As your dog's head tilts back to watch the treat, he'll probably sit.

- 🐾 As soon as his rear end touches the floor, say “yes” and give your dog the treat. Good boy!
- 🐾 Practice about 10 times in a row, until your dog seems to really get it.

If your dog jumps up for the treat, you may have raised it too high over his head. Keep the treat closer to his head when you try again. If your dog stands up or walks backward instead of sitting, try working in a corner with your dog’s back against the wall. This will help him understand what you want him to do.

When your dog knows what’s coming next and starts to sit before you move your hand up and back, he’s ready to learn a verbal cue (a special word) for sit. Take a treat and hold it in your hand at about waist level. When your dog looks like he’s getting ready to sit, say “sit.” When he sits, say “yes” and give him the treat.

Once your dog seems to know the “sit” cue pretty well, practice with him standing at your side. Remember that you need to practice in lots of different places, when it’s raining and when it’s sunny, around different kinds of distractions, and on different types of floors. This way, your dog will know that “sit” *always* means sit, no matter where he is and what else is going on.

Down

After your dog learns to sit, you can teach him to lie down. The down cue comes in handy when you need your dog to settle down and stay where he is for a while. Here’s how to teach your dog to lie down on cue.

- 🐾 Put a handful of small, tasty treats in your pocket and sit or kneel on the floor next to your dog.
- 🐾 Ask him to sit. Good dog!
- 🐾 Lightly rest your left hand on your dog’s shoulders, but *don’t* push down. (Keeping your hand in this position should help prevent him from standing up.)
- 🐾 Hold the treat in your right hand between your thumb and your first two fingers.
- 🐾 Let your dog lick at the treat while it’s still in your fingers, as you slowly lower the treat straight to the floor.





- After your dog's nose has followed the treat to the floor, slowly drag the treat away from him along the floor. He'll probably creep forward with his front legs to try to get the treat, or will lower himself into a down position.
- The second your dog's elbows and chest touch the floor, say "yes" and reinforce him by giving him the treat.

Repeat this a few times. Once your dog seems to get it, add the verbal cue "down." Use your treat to lure him down. As his legs are stretched out and his chest is heading to the floor, say "down." Only give him the treat when he's lying all the way down. Good job!

When your dog will lie down on cue consistently for a few days, start practicing on different surfaces, in different places, and around different types of distractions. Also, give him the cue while you're in different positions, such as sitting, standing, and lying down. This way, he'll know that "down" *always* means lie down.

Come

There are probably lots of times when your dog comes when you call him. Maybe it's when you get home from school or want some company in the backyard. I'll bet he comes when you call him for dinner, too.

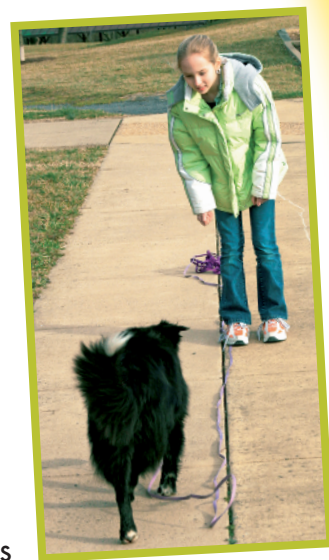
It's important for your dog to come when you call him every time, though. This is especially true when he's not wearing a leash. If you're playing a game with him and you need him to come back to you, you can call him to come. You can call him to come if he's doing something

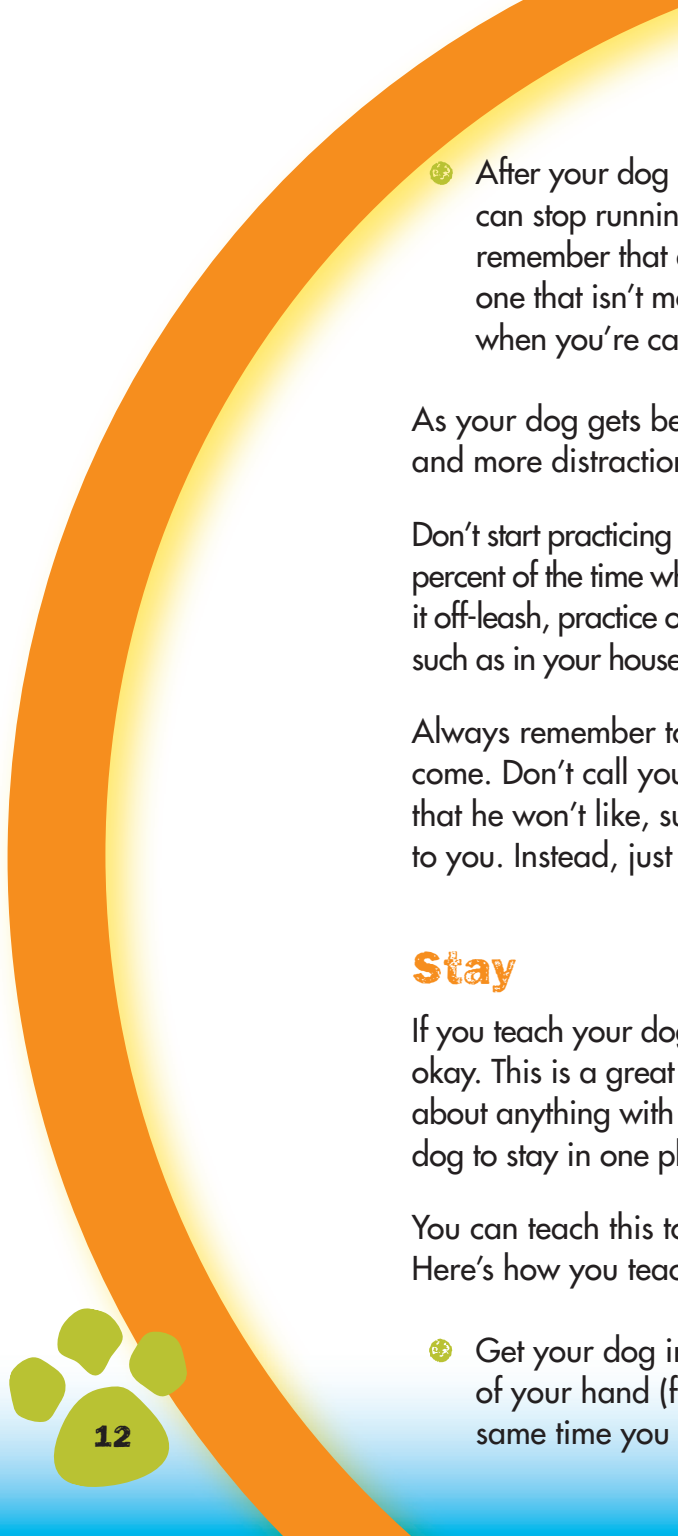
he shouldn't be doing. You can also call him to come when he's off playing by himself or with another dog and it's time to go home.

When you call your dog to come to you, he should come right away, the first time you call him. If you have to keep saying his name over and over, he may not understand what you want him to do. Or else he's learning that he doesn't have to come until you say his name eight times. That's not what you want to teach him.

To teach your dog to come, go to an area that has some distractions (but not too many!), such as your backyard with other people in it, or a quiet park. Be sure to bring some treats. Now, place him on a six-foot leash. It's time to learn to come on cue.

- 🐾 Wait until your dog is interested in something, such as another dog or person, or a smell.
- 🐾 Begin running backward away from him with a treat in your hand. (If your dog is shy, start by running away with your back to your dog.) This may seem strange, but when we run away, most dogs want to follow us.
- 🐾 While running, call the dog to you using his name and the word "come" in a happy tone of voice. "Rover, come!"
- 🐾 As your dog gets near you, stop running and bring your hands together with your thumbs pointing up. Lower your hands to your dog's nose level so he can smell the treat. Your hands will be like a target for your dog to run toward.
- 🐾 When your dog is nearly toe to toe with you, say "sit" and raise your hands up a few inches. (This should bring your hands up a couple of inches higher than the dog is tall.) This small movement will help get your dog to sit.
- 🐾 If your dog runs into you or jumps up on you when coming, say "sit" when he's about five feet away.
- 🐾 After your dog sits, take hold of his collar with your empty hand before giving him the treat. This will get him used to having his collar held and will discourage him from running away. (If you need to grab him in an emergency, there's no time to play Catch Me if You Can.) Make sure he gets the treat and a big welcome!



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- After your dog learns what you mean when you say “come,” you can stop running and say the cue while you’re standing still. Just remember that a moving target is more exciting to your dog than one that isn’t moving. Save running for special situations, like when you’re calling your dog in very distracting places.

As your dog gets better at coming when called, practice with more and more distractions, with your dog on a longer leash each time.

Don’t start practicing with your dog off leash until he comes at least 90 percent of the time while he’s on a leash. When you’re ready to start doing it off-leash, practice only in places that are completely safe for your dog, such as in your house, in a fenced yard, or at a local dog park.

Always remember to act happy when you’re teaching your dog to come. Don’t call your dog when you need to do something to him that he won’t like, such as going inside. If you do, he’ll avoid coming to you. Instead, just go get him.

Stay

If you teach your dog to stay, he won’t get up until you tell him it’s okay. This is a great thing for your dog to know when you’re doing just about anything with him. For example, lots of neat tricks require your dog to stay in one place while you take a step or two away from him.

You can teach this to your dog while he’s wearing a leash, or not. Here’s how you teach stay.

- Get your dog into a sit or down position. Now, bring the palm of your hand (fingers together) toward your dog’s face at the same time you say “stay.”

- 🐾 At first, remain calm and quiet yourself while the dog is staying. He takes his cues from you, so if you're still, he will be too.
- 🐾 Count to five in your head and give your dog a treat if he's still in the same position. Then let him know he's done working by saying "okay." This means he's allowed to get up. (If the dog doesn't move after you say "okay," clap your hands or move your hands or body so your dog moves. This will help him learn that "okay" means he's done.)
- 🐾 Keep practicing. Each time your dog shows you that he can stay, slowly add about five seconds to the amount of time you ask him to stay.



When you're teaching your dog to stay for longer periods, give him a treat every five seconds so he doesn't think that once he earns a reward, he's done staying. You want him to learn to stay until you say "okay." As he gets better at this, you can increase the time between rewards.

Don't repeat the verbal "stay" cue too often. Use it only when your dog is still staying but seems to be losing concentration, or if he's just about to get up. Also use it after you've given him a treat to remind him that he's still supposed to stay.

If your dog gets fidgety when he's staying, say his name to draw his attention to you. Then show the flat palm hand signal again while quietly saying "stay."

If your dog gets up before you say "okay," tell him "wrong" or "eck" and ask him to get back into position by saying "stay" again. Say "wrong" in a quiet tone, not like you're yelling at him—it's just to let him know he made a mistake. Keep an eye on him while he's staying so you can give him feedback as soon as it seems as if he's about to walk off.

If your dog won't remain in the stay, you may not be reinforcing him as much as he needs, or you could be making him excited with your movements. If you give him treats more often and stay quiet but this doesn't help, try working with him in a less distracting place.



Practice having your dog stay while he's sitting and lying down on many different surfaces. Do this in lots of different places and with different types of distractions.

Now your dog knows how to sit, lie down, come, and stay on cue. How cool is that?

Walk on a Leash

It's way more fun to be out with your dog if he knows how to walk nicely on a leash. This is especially important for big dogs. No one likes to walk a dog who drags them around. Even a small dog isn't fun to walk when he's pulling you. Here's how to teach your dog to walk nicely on a leash.

- 🐾 Clip your dog's leash to his collar and put some of his favorite treats in your pocket.
- 🐾 Take him outside to a spot where there's not too much going on. Your backyard is a good place.
- 🐾 Hold a treat in front of your dog and start walking with him at your side. Take just a few steps like this. If he doesn't pull but walks next to you, give him the treat. Good boy!
- 🐾 Practice this several times and soon your dog will start paying attention to you when you're walking. When he does, add a few more steps before giving him a treat.

After a while—or even right away—your dog might start to pull on the leash. If he does, just stop in your tracks and call him back to you. When he comes back, ask him to sit. When he does, give him a treat. Then start over by walking a few steps again while you show him the treat. The idea is to repeat this over and over again until he catches on that he's not supposed to pull or get ahead of you. Be patient—he'll get it.

Teaching Yourself

Your dog isn't the only one who has things to learn. There's some new stuff you'll need to learn as well. When you want to teach your dog a new activity, you first need to learn it yourself and make sure you really understand it. After all, you can't teach your dog something if you're not really sure how it's done.

In the next chapters, I'll tell you how you can learn the details of each activity before you get started. Mostly, watching other people and their dogs is a good way to learn. Sometimes, reading a book or article about the activity can help too. For some activities, it's best to take a class and learn hands-on. For others, you don't need to do much of anything except enjoy yourself.

Of course, the more you know about dogs, the more fun you will have with your canine companion. Here are some ways to learn more about dogs.

- Read books about dog behavior and breeds.
- Get magazines about dogs.
- Check out dog sites on the Internet.
- Watch TV shows about dogs.
- Go to dog shows and competitions.
- Watch dogs interacting at a dog park.
- Spend time hanging out with and watching your own dog.

Learning more about dogs will help you to communicate better with your pal. You'll have more fun with him because you'll understand what he's all about.



Being Safe

It's important to be safe no matter what you're doing. This includes when you're with your dog. It's even more important when you're with dogs you don't know. You also want to make sure your dog is safe from unpleasant interactions with other dogs and from being exposed to things that could make him sick.

Here are some ways to help you stay safe around your own dog.

- **Get to know your dog.** If your dog seems tired or hot, give him some time to rest. If he's nervous or anxious, stop what you're doing. Don't force him to do something he doesn't want to do. When dogs are tired or afraid, they can get crabby and irritable—just like people.
- **Pay attention to aggression.** If your dog ever growls at you or shows you his teeth, stop what you're doing and tell an adult. Don't yell at him or punish him. It's never good to hit or hurt your dog in any way. If your dog growls at you often, you may need to get help from a professional trainer.
- **Don't grab things away from your dog.** Don't ever take a toy or food out of your dog's mouth. Your dog loves you, but sometimes dogs become possessive over food and toys, even with family members. Instead, work with a knowledgeable adult or a dog trainer to teach your dog to let go of objects when you say "drop it." And never tease your dog with a food or toy.

Here are some ways to help you stay safe around dogs you don't know.

- 🐾 **Ask before petting.** Never pet a dog without asking permission first. Some dogs don't like meeting new people.
- 🐾 **Stay away from dog fights.** Sometimes dogs get into fights with one another. Never try to get involved in or stop a dog fight. You could be bitten accidentally—even by your own dog. Instead, go to an adult right away for help. (The good news is that most dog fights are mostly noise and rarely result in injuries to the dogs.)

Here are some ways keep your dog safe when you're involved in activities.

- 🐾 **Use a leash.** Always keep your dog on a leash when you're involved in an activity, unless an adult tells you it's okay to let him loose. When it comes to leashes, you should follow the rules of the activity. Make sure you know what those are!
- 🐾 **Keep a tag on your dog's collar.** Your dog's collar should have an identification tag with your address and phone number. That way, if he gets loose while you're out and about, someone can help him get home to you.
- 🐾 **Keep control.** Don't let your dog run up to unfamiliar dogs. Some dogs don't like other dogs, and a fight may start. Keep your dog under control at all times.
- 🐾 **Go to a veterinarian.** If your dog seems sick or hurt, or just doesn't seem like his usual self, ask an adult to take your dog to the vet.



Seeing the Veterinarian

Before your dog socializes with other dogs or gets involved in dog activities, he should be healthy and up-to-date on his vaccinations. For activities that require physical strength and endurance, such as running, swimming, agility, and pulling a cart, he'll need a complete physical—just like you do before you can play team sports. Your dog should also have a yearly exam to make sure he's healthy, whether or not he's involved in canine activities.

A veterinarian can examine your dog to make sure he's healthy enough to do the things you'd like to do with him. This exam is especially important if you'll be getting involved in stuff that requires your dog to run around a lot or spend lots of time on the go. The vet will also tell you if your dog needs to have a higher-calorie food now that he'll be more active, or if he needs to lose some weight.



Your dog needs vaccines before he can go out and hang around with other dogs. These shots will keep him safe from all kinds of canine diseases. The types of shots your dog needs will depend on his age and where you live. The vet will tell you what's best.

When you take your dog for an exam, ask the veterinarian about flea, tick, and heartworm protection for your dog too. When you start getting active with your dog, he'll be around other dogs and in areas where these parasites may live. You want to do whatever you can to help protect him.

Now you're ready to go out and have some fun with your dog. It's time to discover all the different activities you two can do together. Keep reading!

