

Integrative Veterinary Care
The "Place" Command
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This is a very useful command. I use the word "place" as in "go to your place". Some people use "kennel" or "bed", but "place" more exactly matches my mental image of what I want. I save "kennel" for an actual crate or cage, and "bed" for bedtime. "Place" is any mat or other comfortable, defined area that I point to. When I tell my dog "got to your place" and point, he knows that he is supposed to go lie down on whatever surface I have indicated, and that he is to stay there until released. He does have some flexibility while he is there – he can sit up, he can lie down, he can turn around or roll over as long as part of him is still touching the "place".

I can use this command when I sit down to eat to keep him in the corner, I can use it when I'm cooking or bringing in groceries to keep him out from under foot, I can use it to allow me to answer the front door without canine assistance or to end alert barking – basically, I can use it any time I want my dog to be AWAY from me and quiet.

Teaching the "place" command is simple but slow work. Start with a bath mat, thick towel, or folded blanket. Put it on the floor next to the couch. Take your dog to it gently, tell him "place" or whatever your command is, and give them a treat as all four feet touch the mat. Tell your dog "good place" as he consumes the treat. Do this at least 6 times a day for at least 3 days. Then start telling your dog "place" before you take him there. After another day or two, your dog should be beginning to move towards the "place" when you say the word – or at least looking in the right general direction.

The next step is to up the ante. Begin asking your dog to lie down each time he gets to the place. You can use the down command or you can lure him into the down using the treat, but now the dog only gets the treat for going to place and lying down. Once this concept is firm, start adding your release word to indicate that it's ok for your dog to get up. Start by asking him to stay down for 5 sec, remembering to praise effusively and use treats. You can help your dog at this phase by reminding him "down" or "place" as needed, or by using your "stay" hand signal. Work your way up to 30 sec or so.

Now we need to ask for longer stays at the place. You may want to use a short leash to help remind your dog to remain in place at this point. (The idea behind using the leash is to make it easier for your dog to succeed. The leash should be just long enough to allow your dog to sit comfortably and move a bit, but should keep one foot on the mat at all times.) Ask your dog to go to his place during a commercial break while you watch TV. Attach the leash once your dog is in position. You may pet, praise, and treat your dog throughout the commercial break. At the end of the break, or slightly after, give one last treat and release your dog, remembering to unhook the leash! Once your dog is comfortably staying put for 5 minutes, decrease the frequency of petting, praise and treats gradually over 3-4 sessions until you are praising or petting once during the 5 minutes and treating just before releasing your dog. Begin increasing the duration of stays in place until your dog is staying there through an entire 30 min. show.

I never ask my dog to stay in place for more than 30 min. at a time unless he falls asleep.

Once you can get to 30 min. without your dog breaking, with you right next to him, start moving farther away. Remember to keep going to him intermittently to praise and even treat. As you get farther from your dog, he will become more anxious and the exercise will become more difficult. You need to help him succeed. At first, he may only be able to tolerate you being away from him for a few seconds. That's OK. You do, however, need to remember not to reward anxious behavior. If your dog tries to leave his place or begins to show other signs of anxiety, go back to him and remind him gently what he is supposed to be doing, leave his side for a few seconds less than the last departure, and treat and praise him. You may want to just leave his

side 2 or 3 times during 30 min. for a few sessions and then work up to longer departures, further away.

When you can ask your dog to go to place and he will stay there while you get up and move around the room, or while you sit across the room from him, without using the leash, it is time to expand your dog's view of what the command means. Put down mats in several areas of the house, and ask him to use each one as place. Remember that each new area of the house that "place" is in constitutes a **WHOLE NEW EXERCISE**, so you must go back to the beginning again, asking for a few seconds at a time. Each time you begin the exercise anew, it should progress more rapidly. After you have taught the command several places indoors, begin working on the command outdoors, in the park, wherever you can take a mat.

Teaching the "place" command gives you an easy, positive way to get your dog off of the furniture, out of a guest's face, or out from under foot. You must, however, remember never, ever to use "place" as a reprimand. You may ask your dog to go to his place when you are frustrated with him, but you must not ask him to go in a negative fashion. Also remember that your dog is **ALWAYS** a good dog when he is lying quietly in his place.

If you have difficulty getting your dog to stay on his mat, you may be attempting to progress too rapidly and may be pushing him too hard. Back up and make the exercise simpler -- ask for a shorter stay, practice with fewer distractions, stay closer to your dog, increase the frequency of verbal praise or treats.