

STAY 3: DISTRACTION

Creating a distraction.

Before you take on real-life distractions that are more difficult to control, create your own for practice purposes. You can bounce a tennis ball, squeak a toy, or recruit a family member to walk by. The important thing is to keep the distraction small enough that your dog will be able to hold her stay.

The distraction exercise.

Step 1. Stand in front of your dog. Tell your dog, "Stay" in a cheerful tone of voice, pause for a second, then give the stay hand signal: Hand out in front of you, palm facing dog.

Step 2. Bounce a tennis ball. (If this is too difficult for your dog, try just setting the ball nearby to start, then rolling the ball slowly, etc.)

Step 3. Click or "yes" and treat immediately before your dog breaks her stay. The idea is to reward her before she has a chance to make a mistake.

Step 4. If your dog gets up, tell her, "Too bad," ask for an easier stay and reward her for that. Then work your way back up.

Step 5. Once your dog has mastered the tennis ball distraction, try a different one, for example someone clapping or making another light noise.

When your dog is able to hold her stay through a variety of manufactured distractions, move on to real-life distractions. Choose a place for your training session with light pedestrian traffic and activity. Your front yard, a residential neighborhood sidewalk, or a park at quiet times are good choices. Nothing too crowded or noisy to begin with.

Keep an eye out for distractions nearby. As soon as your dog sees something interesting (another dog, a person, a stroller) while in a stay, Click or "yes" and treat.

Troubleshooting: If your dog is making more than the occasional mistake, you are going too fast. Go back to something easier and work your way up from there. Remember, the secret to teaching stay is to start easy and go slowly.