



No Kill
South Carolina
2024

C H A R L E S T O N A N I M A L S O C I E T Y

DOG RESOURCES

LIFE SKILLS

Life skills are excellent and functional cues that you can use frequently throughout the day, to prevent and solve problems, as well as to have fun!! Life skill behaviors should become default behaviors. For a behavior to become a default, it must have a very long history of being highly reinforced (usually with food) in many different situations and levels of distractions. Default behaviors are accomplished when you can ask for the behavior, with a single cue, anytime and anywhere, and your dog responds promptly!

Basic Life Skill List:

- Sit
- Hand Target (Touch)
- Eye Contact (Watch)
- Relax on a Mat (Relax)
- Positive Interrupter Signal
- Reliable Recall

Important points to keep in mind when training these behaviors:

- HAVE FUN!
- It takes hundreds of repetitions for your dog to truly know a cue.
- Use daily routines to practice during the day.
- Always end on a successful note!
- If you say the cue and your dog does not respond, give them at least 10-15 seconds before repeating the cue. Do not repeat more than three times.

When your dog consistently responds to life skill cues, here are some exercises for you and your dog to enjoy:

- Practice these cues in each room of your home.
- Practice with other people walking around in your home.
- Have other people create distractions in the home while you are working with your dog. Distractions can be noise, motion, etc.
- Once you are doing great in your home (a controlled setting), then you are ready to work in the yard and beyond.

Practice Tips for Working Outside of the Home

When you begin to work outside, you may need to start with higher value treats (cheese, meat) to keep attention and motivation up as you will be competing





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with all the other sights, scents, etc.

Keep practice times short and successful (2-5 minutes). If your dog loses interest, go back indoors and have him perform the command once to end on a good note. Begin the next session inside and then try outside again.

Now that your dog can do this in all rooms, in the yard, and beyond with distractions and chaos going on, you are ready to practice for more challenges.

Remember – any time you change the situation, the environment, or your body posture, it may require a bit more motivation and higher value treats to keep your dog's interest and focus on the task. Recognize that, to the dog, changes in context change the skill, so to him this is all completely new. Begin again at the basics until he really learns to generalize these skills through practice in ALL situations. You may also want to have your dog on a leash as you begin these new exercises.

New Situations and Experience for Practice:

Practice Cues:

- While you are on the phone
- While you are laying down
- Before you go out the door
- While children are playing
- When the doorbell rings
- When guests are in the home
- When out for a walk
- When you see a dog in the distance
- When you see a person in the distance
- When an unfamiliar person is approaching
- When you are at the veterinary hospital
- When in the car

Be creative and have fun! Remember, the more your dog knows what is expected, the more likely they will be to listen and be successful. Practice is the key to success!

Created by Chicago Veterinary Behavior Consultants

