

Calmness

Calmness is one of the **concepts** that makes living with your dog a delight. However, Calmness has to be taught to some dogs. Some dogs have the skill naturally, you know the ones.... the dogs you see that can relax and sleep in the hullabaloo of the pub garden, or the dogs that just walk past other dogs, children or traffic when out and about and the dogs that looks up when there's a knock on the door and then goes back to chilling.



But calmness is one of the most vital skills for a dog to learn to help them cope in our very busy human world. Without this skill our dogs are unable to choose a quiet, relaxing activity. Instead, they choose barking and lunging at noise or movement in their environment, jumping on guests and visitors, sniffing out and stealing food on the table or kitchen counters (counter surfing), being over vigilant when out and about and seemingly

looking for something to bark or lunge at or just running and running when off lead in a new environment, in a state of 'lights on but no one's home' chaos – unable to hear your cues or recall.

Having the ability to be calm allows our dogs to choose to be contented when alone, instead of exhibiting separation behaviours i.e. shredding bedding, chewing furniture and howling/barking when left alone. Calmness makes it possible to allow the dog to make fantastic choices in life.

A calm dog tends to behave appropriately, it doesn't become frustrated easily and isn't overwhelmed by fear.



Now, I hear you all ask.... How do we inspire calm in our dogs at home and everywhere else?



When we rehearse or practice something all the time, it becomes ingrained or 'second nature' or our default. And dogs are no different. If your dog's day is full of activity, high-energy, barking out of the window at passers-by, barking at the door, high energy greetings when family or guest come round. That becomes the 'normal behaviour choice'. The dog will always gravitate to a higher arousal and/or emotional state. These dogs will find it difficult to relax and chill out on their bed or cuddle with you in the face of stimuli. Its also very **bucket** filling living in high arousal.

When we promote calm activities, we help our dogs relax, empty their **buckets** and be worry free in their home and other environments.

Calming activities for dogs include, but are not confined to:

Chewing a long-lasting chew

Licking out food from a Kong or topple

Licking food off a lick mat

Searching out food that you've scattered in the grass

Enjoying a marrow bone



A dog that spends time in the day sleeping and doing these calm activities will become more chilled during the day and this will become the normal behaviour. The dog will become more calm and less high energy. Instead of barking at the door when family members come home, encourage your dog to choose a calm activity e.g. have your dog be in a different room finding treats in a snuffle matt.

Capturing Calmness

We can also **capture** moments of calmness in our dogs. Everyday our dogs will have moments of calm or choosing calmness. If we can reward that moment in time, we'll see an increase in that choice or behaviour. So, when our dogs are asleep, see if you can calmly and quietly drop a small piece of food near their nose. When they stir from sleep, they will find this small morsel of food and so reinforce the action they were doing – in this case sleep.



If you notice that your dog has chosen to come away from the window (that they usually bark at), try and get a food reward in there (preferably without them seeing the treat is coming from you), aim the treat so it lands just in front of them, so they 'happen upon it', as they're walking away *calmly*.

Capturing these moments and rewarding them, increases that behaviour. In essence we're capturing and increasing **calm behaviour** which leads to **calmness** in our dogs. Your dog will thank you.

It's very stressful to be in high energy, high excitement, barking, lunging and dashing about all the time and this leads to an anxious dog.