

Generalization

Have you ever heard someone say, “*Oh, Fido doesn’t jump at home, he can do a down-stay in my kitchen for 10 minutes,*” after Fido has just leapt onto your shoulders and knocked you down outside of PetSmart?

Have you ever noticed that when you go over to a friend’s house, Fluffy seems to think that it’s okay to jump on the couch and generally go nuts in that house?

Dogs are great at discrimination. When we teach our dogs to “sit,” do a “down” or a “stay” in our kitchen, they learn to do just that— to sit, do a down and a stay *in the kitchen*. They get used to the place, sounds, smells and the amount of distractions in any given setting that you are training them in.

They tend to tie all of the sights, smells, and sounds of one location together into what is called a stimulus package.

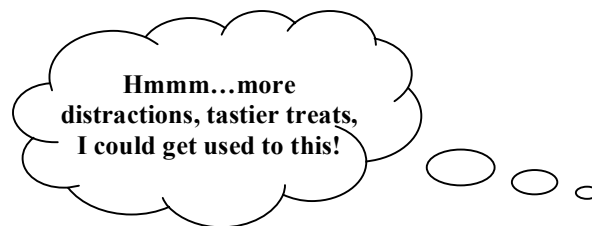
Try training your dog in lots of different places, because a well-trained dog has to be able to do many things outside of his kitchen. When you **generalize training**, you are asking your dog to perform the same commands in a variety of settings.

How to Generalize Training

Step 1: Before you start, make sure your dog can follow basic commands reliably, such as “sit,” “stay,” “down,” and “come.”

Step 2: Next, find a place *outside of your house* where there are a few more distractions than your house, and take your dog there.

Step 3: Let Fido smell, run around, and check out his new surroundings first. Then, practice your sits, stays, comes and downs, but this time, use really yummy treats. In no time, he’ll start thinking.....



Step 4: When these behaviors are just as reliable as doing them in the kitchen, you and your pooch are ready for a new adventure in a different location!

Important Points

- Distance Education! Throw some goodies to your dog from varying distances during this exercise. Since dogs associate reinforced behaviors with the proximity of your body to him, if you *still* give him treats even when you're 5 feet away, he will realize he can perform and still get his payoff!
- Competition Stinks! If your dog suddenly stops listening to your commands, then 1) there are too many distractions for your dog, and/or 2) the reinforcement you are using may not be strong enough. *Don't take it personally, just move to another location with less distractions and tastier treats.*
- He Works Hard For Your Money! Mr. Pooch works for a living too. Make training fun, keep it interesting, and be very enthusiastic when he follows your commands.