



The Restraint or Tie-Up Exercise

“Must-Do!” Exercise for Every Dog and Puppy

The tie-up or restraint exercise stops the dog from having access to you the whole time you are at home. When commenced in puppy-hood it will ultimately develop a dog that is confident when tied-up and left alone, even in an unfamiliar scenario. The exercise assists in the development of puppies’ independence, which is considered highly effective in the prevention of many behavioural issues.

In an over-dependant adult or adolescent dog the exercise will assist in improving the dog’s ability to cope with stress generally.



Start at the easiest possible level. Attach the dog by a short lead (approximately 40 – 60 centimetres) to the leg of the chair you are sitting on. Experience will show the dog that any struggling against the lead (or you at the end of the lead) is futile. This in itself is a great lesson for any dog or puppy to learn. At this stage, do not leave the chair.

The restraint exercise is not designed to be a punishment, although it can be used in the future to provide a time-out punishment. The dog can have comfortable bedding and chew toys whilst restrained. You can pat him and talk to him occasionally if he is calm and well behaved.

Our aim at each step of this programme is to induce a mild level of stress. If this first level of the restraint exercise is at all stressful to the dog, it will be a mild degree of stress only because he is in a familiar environment and you are with him the whole time. It will cease to induce stress after sufficient repetitions. You can then take the next step that will induce a new mild level of stress; maybe sit just out of his reach. After sufficient repetitions, this level will no longer induce stress at

Tip!

For puppies and dogs who cannot cope with being in the backyard on their own or shut into the laundry, the tie-up exercise can be a great means of gradually introducing these scenarios. Eg: start tie-up inside near the backdoor, progress to just outside the door with the door open, start reducing the opening of the door, completely close the door, tie-up further away from the back door, etc,

all. Now you may sit a little further away or work at the nearby kitchen bench. Sufficient repetitions will result in this scenario no longer being stressful to the dog or puppy. By repeatedly exposing the puppy or dog to mild levels of stress until the situation no longer induces any stress, we are increasing the dog's threshold for stress or increasing his capacity to cope with stress.

Your next steps might include:

- leaving the room briefly (just a second or two the first time);
- gradually increasing the length of time you leave the room;
- moving around the house further away;
- tie-up in the backyard with you in sight;
- tie-up in the backyard with you moving in and out of sight;
- now the front porch with you in sight;
- front porch with you coming and going;
- the park with you in sight;
- the park with you disappearing occasionally;
- a friend's house with you in sight;
- I think you get the idea!

Freedom from the restraint exercise can only be granted when the dog has been behaving perfectly for at least ten seconds.

NB If the dog or puppy suddenly starts vocalising after having been calm and accepting of the situation, he may desperately need a toilet break. Concede to this situation but do watch out for the dog "using" the behaviour to gain freedom in the future.

The programme is progressive in level of difficulty. However, every other aspect should be variable: vary the duration of the tie-up; vary the location; vary the time of day; vary the person involved.

Some dogs may not experience any level of stress at all for several levels, but we cannot predict what level we could have started from, beforehand. So, it is safest to start at the easiest possible level and progress at the dog's pace of comfort.

Taking a step too soon for the dog's individual ability, which results in the dog becoming highly distressed, will produce sensitisation to the situation. Your programme will take a large backward step!

Yawning and licking indicates stress or conflict in a dog, particularly in a restraint situation. As the dog's state of calmness and relaxation increases with experience of the restraint exercise, his level of stress and conflict is reducing and the licking and yawning will be seen to decrease.

The aim is to place the dog in a position of solitary restraint that invokes a mild level of stress. After sufficient repetitions at each new level to the point where it is no longer stressful, the dog's ability to deal with stress has been increased. Never place the dog in a situation that is highly stressful causing the dog to panic – this would undermine his confidence and increase his sensitivity to being restrained or separated from you.

I recommend varying the length of the restraint exercise at each level, from a couple of minutes up to two hours for puppies under four months of age; and up to three or four hours for adolescent and adult dogs. It sounds like a long time, but consider how long you might sit watching television, at the computer, napping or socialising.

Vary the location of the restraint exercise from the very beginning. It should not be conducted in the same location on every occasion. The time of day should also vary, as should the length of the exercise.

Puppies and adolescents should experience a restraint exercise every day. Adult dogs displaying problematic behaviour, particularly any form of anxiety, should also experience the exercise daily. Mature and well-adjusted adult dogs should continue to experience a restraint exercise approximately once a week for life.

I would like all puppies and dogs to ponder the restraint exercise as having no rhyme or reason, it just happens regularly. I would like all dogs to be capable to be tied-up on the front porch of a house where they have never been before, while their owners are inside the house for several hours. The dog is accepting of being “restrained and abandoned in a strange place”. He is not barking, howling, chewing through his lead or digging at the ground in distress, because he is calm and comfortable with the situation, knowing his family will return for him.

Also consider conditioning your dog or puppy to crate confinement in a similar process to the restraint exercise. Most dogs love the feeling of a safe haven or “den” that the crate provides. The crate provides convenience and safety when required. I highly recommend crate training.

If the dog is experiencing difficulties in accepting that there will be times that he is expected to be in the backyard on his own (this is another great situation to build independence), the restraint exercise or placing the dog in his familiar crate can assist. Simply conduct a tie-up outside the backdoor with the backdoor open or place the dog in the crate outside the open backdoor and don't go far away.

Gradually build on this situation until the dog is content on his own in the yard.

