
Southern CKCS Club

W E L F A R E O R G A N I S A T I O N

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Guide to Basic Training for your Cavalier

Please read the word 'his' and 'him' in this document to apply to both males and females.

We encourage all dog owners to complete at least basic obedience training with their dogs. Training opens up a line of communication between you and your dog. Effective communication is necessary to instruct your dog about what you want him to do. You can teach him anything from 'stay' (don't bolt out the door) to 'sit' (don't jump up on the visitors) to 'off' (don't chew the furniture).

Dog owners have a responsibility to make sure that their dogs are well behaved members of our society. A dog that is taught to pay attention and to follow certain commands is usually more secure, and certainly much safer than a dog that is not. Patience, persistence and consistency are the most important concepts in any kind of teaching. This guide contains some basic commands and training techniques. Your rescue Cavalier may already know a few basic commands and you may wish to extend this. The main aim should be to build a bond between you and your dog and to enjoy the process. Although this guide is sufficient for you to train your dog to obey some basic commands, you may wish to join your local training club as you will not only be able guided by a trainer, socialise your dog, make new friends along the way and be involved in dog related activities.

You CAN teach an old dog new tricks – Try it!

Sit

Hold a treat in front of your dog's nose and slowly move the treat up and slightly back over the dog's head. This will encourage the dog to lift up his head, which will make him bum go down and you have a sit. Tell the dog 'sit', praise and give the treat. Do not push down on your dog's hips or smack his bum when teaching him to sit, this will not only upset your dog, but will also encourage him to resist and push back and also will teach him only to sit when you touch his bum.

By using the treat method, you can slowly amend this to just using the hand signal (pretend to have a treat) and then you can use the command from a distance if you need to or with a deaf dog.

Down

Either from the sit or stand position, hold the treat in front of your dog's nose and slowly move the treat down in a vertical line to the floor. This will encourage your dog to follow the treat and he will need to lie on the floor to easily reach it. Tell the dog 'down', praise and give the treat. Sometimes you may need to move the treat back slightly as you move it to the floor, depending on your individual dog. Never stamp on the lead or force your dog to lie down, this can cause back or neck problems, is likely to upset your dog and will also show him that down is a nasty thing to do.

The alternative method to use if the above doesn't work (some dogs refuse to do it that way) is to sit on the floor with your knees in an arch. Have the dog one side of you and a treat the other side and encourage your dog to go under your knees and reward, then lower your knees so he has to crawl under, reward again and finally lower them even more so that he has to lie down under your knees. At this point give the 'down' command, praise and reward.

Stand

Either from the sit or down position hold the treat in front of your dog's nose and slowly move your hand forward in a horizontal line, with the other hand (if needed), gently tickle the dog under his back leg to encourage him to get up and stay standing. As the dog gets up, tell him 'stand', praise and give the treat. Try to avoid pushing your dog up into the stand, again because he will only learn to stand when you make him, but also it won't be very comfortable to squash his stomach.

Recall

This can be done anywhere and everywhere and should be a very exciting exercise, so make it fun!! Have a few treats or a toy and in a very exciting voice call your dog's name and say the command 'come', as soon as you have done this, either crouch down and open your arms or bend over and open your arms in a welcoming gesture. As soon as he starts to come, tell him 'good boy....come', keeping the voice very exciting and really make him want to come to you. When he reaches you, praise like mad, gently take hold of the collar and give the treat, then if you have a toy, give him a little game. NEVER tell your dog off for coming, even if it has taken him 5 minutes to decide to come to you, always be nice and praise him, just make the praise a bit calmer if he takes a long time. If you are having problems with the recall, only do this exercise on a long lead or line so that you can stop your dog from running away and also you can give a very gentle reminder tug to encourage him to come to you. This does not mean pull him or jerk him!!!

Examination

This is best done when your dog is calm, wait until he is tired or after a meal and make sure you do not force him to be handled, make it calm, but fun. Stroke your dog's head and along his back telling him he is a very good boy. Gently look at his eyes, ears, teeth and in his mouth. Move down his neck and chest onto his front legs, run your hand down the legs and touch his feet.

Gently look under his feet and in between the toes. Praise him and give him a treat for being good. Now move down his body touching his back and belly, then run your hand along his back and down his tail and very gently pull the tail. This will make sure that if a child pulls his tail, he is used to the feel of it and won't react in a fearful or aggressive way. Now feel down his back legs and back paws, also feel inside the back legs so he gets used to being examined and doesn't get scared. This is very important for being examined at the vets and if there are children around playing with the dog. Tell the dog he is very good and give another treat, then have a game to reward him for being still.

Watch Me

Get your dog to sit next to you or in front of you and have a treat in your hand, show him the treat and get him to focus on it, then tell him 'watch me' and give the treat. Repeat two or three times, then start to move the treat up towards your nose, in small stages and keep giving the command 'watch me' and give the treat. When your dog is doing this reliably, move your position so that he is watching you from various angles and different places. Then whenever you want to get his attention, you can call his name and say 'watch me'.

Wait

When you use the wait command, your dog will learn that you are going to call him away from that position and that he won't have to wait there for very long. Think of this as a 'just a minute' command, there will always be something else to follow. Sit your dog on a lead and get him to sit on your left hand side. Tell your dog to 'wait' and move in front of his toes, give him a treat and praise him. Repeat two or three times, then begin to take a small step backwards using the lead if necessary to hold the dog back (gently). Give the command 'wait', step back to him quickly, praise and give the treat. Slowly increase the distance between you and your dog, but don't push him too far so that he makes a mistake.

Stay

Stays are very similar to the wait, but when you use the stay command, your dog should never be called from that position. There is nothing to follow this command, except praise and a reward and this will encourage your dog to sit or lie down and stay more securely. Have your dog on the left either sitting or lying down, depending on what exercise you are doing. Tell your dog 'stay' and count to three using your stay command as your counter i.e. Stay, stay, stay, then praise your dog and give the treat. Repeat this, but now extend the time to a count of five, again using your commands as a counter. When you do a down stay, stroke your dog along his back to encourage him to relax and stay down. Slowly increase the time as you feel your dog is making progress, but don't push him too far so that he makes a mistake.

Heelwork

Use a treat and get your dog sitting on the left hand side, show him the treat and if possible, keep the treat very close to his nose to encourage him to

follow it. Walk forward in a right hand circle, so that your dog is walking round you, give him the command 'heel' or 'close' and do one full circle, praising the dog as you go round and then get him to sit, praise him and give the treat. As he gets better, increase the size of the circle and slowly make it into more of a square, then when he has mastered that without pulling forward, try a straight line and then move curves and figures of 8 etc. Remember not to push your dog too far so that he makes a mistake. ALWAYS remember that in this exercise, the lead is only there to stop your dog from running off and should NEVER be used to jerk your dog or hold him in close, the treat is your lure to keep him in the right place.

Food Refusal

Have your dog on a lead and on the left hand side again, place a treat on the floor quite a distance away from him and tell him 'leave it'. Hold him back on the lead if necessary, then slowly release the lead, but if he goes to grab the food, hold him back and tell him again 'leave it'. Only when you can release the lead and he still stays there, can you tell him 'ok...get it' and let him have the treat. Slowly move the treat closer and closer as he learns to wait nicely until you can place the treat on his paw and he still leaves it alone.

Retrieve

Get your dog excited and interested in his favourite toy, have him on a long lead and throw the toy a short distance away, let him immediately chase it and when he gets hold of it, tell him 'hold it' and call him back to you. If he comes immediately back with the toy, praise like mad, give a few treats and have a good game with the toy. If he isn't keen to come back, gently pull the lead and encourage him to come back to you, then praise him and give a treat. If he won't give the toy up, you can either offer a treat as an exchange for the toy, or gently put your fingers in his mouth behind the toy and poke his tongue to make him spit the toy out, then praise and give the treat.

ALWAYS remember to make your commands clear and only practice for 5 or 10 minutes each session.

ALWAYS make it fun and enjoyable for you and your dog and never get cross with him. If he does it wrong, it's you that has failed because your instructions were not clear enough.

ALWAYS use the same commands, never change them half way through training, eg. If you use close for walking to heel, don't change it to heel after a month.

NEVER shout during training, if you come up against a mental block with your dog, stop the exercise, do something he knows, praise him and finish the training session.

NEVER use a choke chain on your dog, this can cause neck and back problems, damage to the dog's trachea and hurts. There are plenty of alternative training aids out there today such as double action training collars, halti's and gentle leaders.

Think of dog training as teaching someone a new language, you know what you mean, but the person you are teaching does not. Take things slowly and always keep calm, most of the time you can manoeuvre the dog into position by using the food treat and you don't need to touch them at all.

Dog training should and in most cases can be done using the 'hands off' method, which means that you don't push or pull your dog into position, or smack him or jerk your dog around. As previously mentioned, the lead is not there for you to pull your dog around on, it's purely a safety precaution to stop your dog running into the road or running off. During training always use the smallest / lightest lead you can get away with as this will be more comfortable for your dog and easier for you to work with.

Training should always be fun and should never be done if you are in a bad mood or have had a bad day. If your dog does gets confused and tries an alternative behaviour (trying to tell you he doesn't understand and will this do instead), like giving you his paw, praise him and give that behaviour a command, like 'good boy, give paw'. This way you are encouraging the dog to experiment in training and he will be happier to try new things and will be open to learning more easily and enjoy it more.