



# CALMING & SETTLING TECHNIQUES

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Dogs can be excited, worried or anxious when they attend training classes. Because the training center is a different environment filled with new smells, new people, and new dogs we sometimes have to help them settle.

If your dog is pacing, barking, whimpering or generally unfocused there are several calming and settling techniques that can help him to relax and be more able to think and focus.

## MASSAGE

Simply touching and petting your dog can be calming and relaxing. It is important that your dog likes to be touched and petted; only touch them in places they like. All massage should be long, slow strokes. Rubbing or scratching quickly is often stimulating, which is the opposite of what we want to accomplish! Many dogs like slow, deep scratches on the back of the neck and ears. Some dogs prefer long scratches down the length of their body. Think about the type of petting your dog likes when you are snuggling on the couch and repeat that in the training center.

## CRADLING PUPPIES

Depending on your puppy, cradling him gently in your arms can be calming. Do not force him to be held in positions he doesn't like or squeeze him to insist he sits still. Cradling positions should be relaxing and enjoyable for both of you.

## FIND IT

This quick and easy game distracts your dog from what may be going on in the room. Simply toss a treat on the floor and say 'Find It' as your dog goes to eat it. Make it easy to start by tossing the treat while he is watching, and help him find it if he doesn't see it land on the floor. As your dog learns to sniff and search for the treats you toss, add more and more pieces to each toss so he has to find multiple pieces.

## CHEWIES

Some dogs will love to have a special chew item to busy them. Items like Himalayan Chews, Bully Sticks, and Smoked Bones can really keep a dog busy. It also a great mental break you can provide them throughout class.

## "PUPPY PACIFIERS"

Not just for puppies, this suggestion can really be a fun, enriching distraction for any age dog. Kongs are the best dog toy invention ever! Stuff them with special treats to keep you dog's attention so they are more settled in class. If your dog is new to Kongs, start out with something easy like peanut butter. If he understands how to lick out the inside, increase the challenge and freeze the Kong for a longer lasting treat. Be creative with fillers: peanut butter, pumpkin, cream cheese, yogurt, sweet potato, and applesauce can be used or even a mix of them! Add an extra level of yumminess by including treats or kibble to really capture your dog's attention. Other stuffer toys include Bionics, Squirrel Dudes, and Twist-n-Treats.

## TARGETING

Teaching your dog to touch his nose to your hand is a great focusing exercise. Place your closed fist directly in front of your dog's nose and the second he sniffs it, say "Yes" followed by a treat. Keep placing your hand close to his nose so it is easy for him to have success. Each time he targets your hand with his nose mark the behavior with "Yes" and a treat. As he starts to repeat the behavior add the cue "Touch" as he touches your fist. Mark the behavior "Yes" and treat! Doing multiple fast repetitions of this behavior provides an opportunity for your dog to perform an easy behavior that gets a high rate of reinforcement. Perfect for distracted, busy, worried, or fearful dogs.

Keep in mind that whether your dog is excited or worried, his ability to think and focus greatly declines as his emotions take over. Implementing the techniques above can make your class much more enjoyable for both of you and your dog will learn more too!