

# Obedience

by Sgt. Rick Fackrell - Chief Instructor Toronto Police Dog Services

*If you don't have obedience, you don't have control. If you don't have control then you don't have a Police Service Dog.*

This is something I have preached since the early 60s. If you think about it every exercise you do with your dog be it apprehension--searching exercises--agility, in every one of them you use obedience and control. You tell a dog to out and down,--out and heel, it is obedience. You tell a dog to up and heel it is obedience.

The more obedience you put into a dog the more control you will have over it, which will give you a better product on the street. I have had people tell me that they don't like to go to heavy into obedience as it may take away their working in the other exercises. This is to me a lame excuse not to do obedience and these people are possible trainers putting Police Dogs on the streets.

Obedience is the most important and the first exercise to be taught to a Police Service Dog. The public expects to see a well-trained, obedient dog when they see a Police Service Dog. If you do not have this control, then it could very well tarnish the reputation of the unit; but more importantly, jeopardize your safety, the dogs safety and the public's as well. As a handler, you must never lose your temper or nag at your dog. Do not let the obedience sessions go on to long as the dog will become lethargic. Always end on a happy note reward the dog with its kong or ball.

When doing the obedience exercises, choose different locations. This is so that the dog does not assume that it only need to properly in a certain area.

Before starting a dog in obedience the handler must be taught how to handle a leash and correct the dog properly to get the right response from it. On my courses the handlers are only allowed to use a 6' leash until they graduate. They then receive their 4'. Some still continue with the 6' if that is their choice. I have them clip there leash on to chain link fence then demonstrate the check release method to show the amount of pressure that is needed to correct a dog. The dogs are also fitted with a nylon collar, which I make. I find that this type of collar gets better corrections than the link type or fur saver which when put over the dogs head is some times to big, when it gets around its neck. The collar then is constantly slipping down and you end up getting no corrections. The collar should be placed up and under the dog's ears tight enough that it won't slip down. To make sure it is not to tight, you should be able to slip three fingers under it.

Dogs learn by *ACTION-REACTION-REWARD*, or *STIMULI-REPONSES-REWARDS*.

The dogs learn fastest when the behaviour is constantly rewarded, be it by food, praise by voice and patting, or by giving it its favorite toy. These are your primary reinforcers especially food and the physical touch. Remember when you tell the dog to sit and he does so, it must be rewarded immediately other wise if it is not it will not know why it is getting this treat. This has to be carried out in all exercises, if not you will find that the dog's responses to your commands will start to diminish.

## **COMMANDS**

Your words of command to the dog must be clear and concise. When giving commands the sound and tone is what controls the dog not the loudness. Dogs have a far greater sense of hearing than humans and the quieter you give the commands the better response you will

get. I do believe some handlers think their dogs are deaf as I often hear them screaming commands at them, when it is totally unnecessary. The quieter you give the command the more the dog has to concentrate on you.

When you give a command the dog must react to it at once as you do not give a second one. Once the command is given the dog reacts or it is placed in that position with a sharp correction. I have seen handlers tell the dog to sit three times before correcting it.

*They then wonder why the dog does not sit until it has been told three times.*

When starting a dog of in a new exercise you have to show the dog what it is you want him to do. Before going on to another exercise be sure the dog has mastered the one you have been teaching or you may confuse it.

The first exercise I teach the dog is **the heel**. The idea of this exercise is to have the dog walk on your left or right side with its shoulder in line with your knee. The leash should hang down in a loop and not tight as the dog we pull against it if it is. If the dog forges ahead of you do a lot of left turns the dog will soon get tired of banging into your knee.

If he lags then encourage the dog up to you or break into to a jog. Heel work should always be done at a brisk pace and if it is you will not usually have a dog lag.

The next exercise I teach after the heel is **the stand**. I have found that when you get a green dog that has no obedience and you start by teaching it to walk to heel the first thing it does when you stop is to stand as it is the natural thing for it to do. This is the time I teach it to stand.

It becomes so easy because this is what the dog wants to do when you stop walking. It is so much better than teaching the dog to sit first then trying to get it to stand.

When you do the sit first, before going to the stand, you get the dog so solid in the sit that, when you go to the stand you get into a tussle with the dog because it wants to sit. You have to put your hands under him to try to stop it. This tends to make the dog squirm around and can become frustrating for a handler, especially a green handler.

**The sit:** To get the dog to do this exercise, you will have the dog in the stand at the heel position. Give the command and apply downward pressure on the hind just above the tail, at the same time use upward pressure with the leash to stop the dog going forward. The dog must be sitting straight facing forward in the heel position and any crookedness must be corrected.

**The down:** This in my opinion is the most important obedience exercise that there is. This is the exercise that could save your dogs life or get you out of a law suit. Your dog could be running after a suspect and heading for a highway. If you have the ability to down that dog to save it from running onto the highway then you have saved it's life.

If you do not have the running recall and you have sent your dog after a suspect when you realize it is the wrong person and you command the dog down, you may have saved your self from a law suit.

I find this to be a better exercise than the recall as on the streets if you down the dog then realize that the person is the one you want the dog is still focussed on that suspect and can

go, rather than having the dog on his way back to you.

**The STAY:** This is a command that I do not use. To me it is a redundant command. When I tell a dog to sit, stand, or down then I expect it to stay in that position until it is told to move.

## **DISTANT CONTROL**

For operational work you have to be able to control your dog from a distance in certain circumstances. It is then necessary to teach the dog to respond to commands from a distance by both hand and voice.

**SIT INTO THE DOWN:** Have the dog in the sit position on the 6 foot leash and facing the handler. The handler will stand approximately 5 feet in front of the dog with the loop of the leash in the left hand. To put the dog into the down, the handler will raise the right arm straight out in front and at shoulder height. The handler will command the dog "DOWN" and simultaneously take a step forward bringing the right hand down towards the ground in front of the dog. As soon as the dog goes down, it must be praised. If the dog is slow in going down, give a gentle jerk on the leash by hitting the leash with the right hand as it comes down. This should suffice as a correction.

**DOWN INTO THE SIT:** With the dog in the down position, the handler will stand in front of the dog at the end of the 6' foot leash, with the loop in the left hand. The handler's right arm will be down by the right side. The handler will give the command 'SIT' and at the same time take a step forward with the right foot, raise the right arm and give an upward jerk on the leash. As soon as the dog is in the sit position, it must be praised.

This exercise must be continued in this manner until the dog is doing it without the aid of the leash. Once the dog is going this off leash, then the distance between the dog and the handler will be increased.

## **STAND FROM THE SIT OR DOWN:**

With the dog in the sit position and the handler standing in front of it at the end of the 6 foot leash, the handler will hold the right arm out to the side with the right hand open and the palm facing the dog. The handler will give the command 'STAND' and take a step back with the right foot. The right arm will be straight back. This should bring the dog up into the stand. Once the dog is in this pose, it must be praised. If you find the dog coming forward, then the right arm and foot must return to their original position. The right hand palm should then act as a blocker. If the dog does not come up with the arm and leg movement, then a slight tug on the leash should be given.

This exercise must be continued until the dog can do these lessons, stand from the sit and stand from the down, without the aid of the leash.

**RECALL TO HANDLER.** This is another very important exercise for the P.S.D. as immediately upon being given the command, the dog must return to the handler. This is sometimes a frustrating lesson to teach the dog. The handler must remember that the dog must never be punished for failing to return on command.

Start this exercise by having the dog on the thirty foot line. Slip the line onto the collar of the dog and using only about ten feet of the line, allow the dog to wander away from you. The dog should then be called by its name and given the command "come", at the same time give a gentle jerk on the line. The handler should then run backwards away from the dog. All

the time is coming to you, it must be encouraged and when it reaches the handler The dog must be praised enthusiastically and may even be rewarded with its kong or ball.

The dog must remember that this is a happy exercise and that it looks forward to coming back to its handler.

As improvement is made, the distance will be increased until the dog is off leash, coming back from greater distances into the heel position.

*These ten rules must be followed by my handlers:*

- 1: Be patient.
- 2: Do not nag the dog.
- 3: Never lose your temper with the dog.
- 4: Never whistle your dog back to you
- 5: Use different tones of voice for different commands.
- 6: Make sure the dog understands what it is you want it to do.
- 7: Repetition and praise are the keys to success.
- 8: Do not let a mistake go by. If it is not corrected, it could cause you and your dog a lot of frustration.
- 9: Do not prolong the obedience sessions.
- 10: BE CONSISTENT.

***ALWAYS REMEMBER YOU ONLY GET OUT OF A DOG WHAT YOU PUT IN.***

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