



## Teaching the Behaviors in the VSA Basic Manners Curriculum

# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Instructions .....                            | 3  |
| Behaviors and Exercises .....                 | 5  |
| Attention .....                               | 5  |
| Name Recognition .....                        | 5  |
| Sit .....                                     | 5  |
| Touch .....                                   | 6  |
| Settle on Mat .....                           | 6  |
| Luring .....                                  | 7  |
| Default Sit .....                             | 7  |
| Default Stand .....                           | 8  |
| Find It! .....                                | 8  |
| Down .....                                    | 9  |
| Stand (on cue) .....                          | 9  |
| Lift .....                                    | 10 |
| Puppy Zen .....                               | 10 |
| Touch – Post-it Note .....                    | 11 |
| Touch – Go Say Hello .....                    | 11 |
| Gotcha! .....                                 | 12 |
| Polite Leash Walking .....                    | 13 |
| Trade Ya! (with toys) .....                   | 14 |
| Not Yours! .....                              | 14 |
| Come When Called – “Here” .....               | 15 |
| Give Paw .....                                | 15 |
| Wait .....                                    | 16 |
| Games .....                                   | 17 |
| Join Up .....                                 | 17 |
| Cookie Toss Game (for Name Recognition) ..... | 17 |
| Cookie Toss Game (with new cue, “Here”) ..... | 18 |
| Here (Restrained Recall) .....                | 18 |

## Instructions

This document includes instructions for teaching all of the behaviors in the VSA Basic Manners Group Class Curriculum. The instructions provided are based on the following instructional format, which you can use when introducing a new behavior to your students:

1. **Explain** – This is what you say about the behavior... what it is, why it's important.
2. **Show it** – Follow the steps below to demonstrate the behavior with a dog (at the Intensive, you'll initially demonstrate with a stuffed dog).
3. **Help them do it** – This is when you circulate among the handler/dog teams in your class to help as they practice the behavior with their dog.

## Introducing Cues to Behaviors

As you demonstrate and practice the behaviors, remember that when the dog is showing some understanding of the behavior you can introduce a cue. As you think about your training plan for each behavior, determine the type of cue you'll use, e.g., a verbal cue or a hand signal. The actual point at which you add a cue to a behavior will vary depending on the behavior, but as a general rule, once the dog is offering the behavior regularly, you can insert the cue right before the behavior happens.

With some behaviors, you will also want to teach a Release Cue, such as "Okay" or "Free," to indicate to the dog that he's free stop doing what you previously cued him to do and proceed (e.g., to move across a boundary, to get up from a mat, etc.).

## Snapshot of 8-week class

| Week | Behaviors (new skills and existing skills practice)   |
|------|---|
| 1*   | Attention, Name Recognition, Sit, Touch   |
| 2    | Settle, Luring, Release Cue, Default Sit, Default Stand, Find it!, Attention, Name Recognition, Touch |
| 3    | Down, Stand, Lift, Attention, Settle  |
| 4    | Puppy Zen, Touch, Gotcha!, Attention, Settle, Lured Sits  |
| 5    | Polite Leash Walking, Attention, Settle, Verbal Sits  |
| 6    | Trade ya, Not Yours, Attention, Settle, Default Sits  |
| 7    | Come when Called, Attention, Settle, Lured Sits   |
| 8    | Give Paw, Wait, Attention, Settle, Verbal Sits  |

*\*Class 1 is Orientation which is without dogs*

# Behaviors and Exercises

## Attention

**Explain:** This exercise uses capturing to reinforce your dog's attention and to encourage automatic check-ins. Being able to get your dog's attention is useful in virtually every situation with your dog, whether it's at home, on a walk, at class, or at some other location.

Steps:

- Observe the dog, and the instant the dog orients toward you, mark and treat.
- Verbally praise the dog and take your attention off the dog (giving them permission to visually explore the environment). Repeat.

## Name Recognition

**Explain:** This exercise teaches your dog to immediately look at you when you say the dog's name.

**Note:** This exercise is one that clients can practice at home at first (with low distractions) before practicing at class.

Steps:

- Say the dog's name, when the dog orients toward you, mark and treat. Repeat a few times.
- Next, at class, say the dog's name. Look for any small movements from the dog (an ear flick, a head turn, a head lift), mark and treat.
- Continue to practice in a variety of situations until the dog is reliably responding to his name.

## Sit

**Explain:** Sit is a behavior that most dog owners wish for, and it's a nice impulse control exercise. It's a behavior that you can capture or you can jump start it with a lure.

Steps:

- To capture: Wait for the dog to sit, then mark and treat.
- To lure: Hold a treat in front of the dog's nose and slowly move it up and back over his head. The moment the dog's rear end touches the ground, mark and treat.
- When the dog is starting to reliably sit, introduce a cue.

## Touch

**Explain:** Teaching your dog to touch your hand with his nose has a variety of uses. It's an easy way to move your dog into a different position, it can help an exuberant dog stay focused on you, and can also help a timid dog gain confidence. It's also a wonderful foundation behavior to begin teaching other more advanced behaviors.

Steps:

- Place your hand within one inch of the dog's nose. As soon as the dog moves his nose toward your hand, mark and treat.
- Present your hand again. The instant your dog's nose touches your hand, mark and treat. Repeat.
- If the dog does not touch your hand, try offering it again, but slightly closer to the dog's nose.
- If the dog tries to paw at your hand rather than touch with his nose, try offering your fist versus your flat hand.
- Next, begin to offer your hand a few inches from the dog's nose so that he has to move a short distance to touch it.
- Continue to practice until the dog will move a short distance in order to touch your hand.
- If the dog stands still or sits, try tossing a treat behind him, then as soon as he turns back toward you offer your hand.
- Alternate hands, practicing with both your right and left hands.

## Settle on Mat

**Explain:** Settle teaches your dog to go to a specific place, a mat, and relax, which is a valuable behavior with many uses. Through the training process dogs develop a positive association with their mat, as well as impulse control. Once this happens, you can ask your dog to relax on the mat at class, at home (during dinner or when you have company), or anywhere you go with your dog.

Steps:

- Lure the dog onto the mat, when his feet are on the mat, mark and treat. Toss a treat away from the mat to reset the dog for another try. Repeat a few times.
- Introduce a cue, such as "place" or "go to bed." Say the cue just as the dog is steps on the mat.
- Next, lure the dog onto the mat and cue "down," mark and treat if the dog lies down.
- Continue to practice until the dog is starting to go the mat and lie down.

Next steps:

- Cue the dog to "place" from a short distance away from the mat, slowly increasing the distance the dog moves to get to the mat.
- Encourage the dog to remain on the mat for a short duration of time. You can deliver treats while he lays on the mat. If the dog knows the "wait" behavior, you can cue "wait" once he's settled on the mat.
- Continue to practice, alternating building distance and duration, until the dog can go to and relax on a mat.

## Luring

**Explain:** Luring takes some practice and these two luring exercises are great for developing your mechanical skills and focus, and also your dog's focus. It also helps you and your dog learn to move together as a team, both in a straight line and in a circle, which will be valuable skills when teaching polite leash walking. Basically, it's just building your luring skills, which you will use for teaching other behaviors.

### Luring 4 Steps

Steps:

- Use a food lure (cookie magnet) to lure the dog into position beside you and take 4 steps.
- Lure with the hand on the side closest to the dog (dog on your left, lure in left hand, and vice versa).
- After 4 steps, stop and feed the treat.

### Luring around a cone

Steps:

- Lure the dog to walk around a cone (or a chair).
- If the dog will not follow the lure, use a higher value treat and/or break the movement down into a fewer steps and then treat.
- Practice until the dog will follow the lure around the cone/chair.

## Default Sit

**Explain:** Teaching your dog a default sit provides a foundation for many other behaviors including Wait, polite greetings, and more. Default behaviors are those that your dog offers automatically – by default – because the behavior has been heavily reinforced. Default behaviors are beneficial in that if your dog doesn't know what "to do" in a situation, he can decide to offer a default behavior without you giving him instructions. Note: you'll capture this behavior when your dog offers it spontaneously – the default sit is not a cued behavior.

Steps:

- Observe the dog, capture the moment he sits, mark and treat.
- Feed on the ground so that the dog has to get up to get the treat. This "resets" him for another repetition.
- Wait until the dog sits again, then mark and treat.
- Continue to practice until the dog is reliably offering the sit.

## Default Stand

**Explain:** This exercise teaches your dog that standing still is reinforcing, and it's also great for teaching body awareness. The behavior is handy in so many situations including at class, at the vet or groomer, or anytime you'd like your dog just to stand still. Default behaviors are those that your dog offers automatically – by default – because the behavior has been heavily reinforced. Default behaviors are beneficial in that if your dog doesn't know what "to do" in a situation, he can decide to offer a default behavior without you giving him instructions. Note: you'll capture this behavior when your dog offers it spontaneously – the default stand is not a cued behavior.

Steps:

- Observe the dog, capture the moment he stands with a mark and treat.
- Feed so that the dog's head is parallel with the ground. If you feed too high the dog will likely sit, if you feed too low the dog will likely lie down.
- At first, mark and treat any brief stands. Then begin to mark and treat for a few seconds of "stillness" in the standing position.
- Continue to practice, slowly building the duration (length of time the dog stands still).

## Find It!

**Explain:** This exercise helps to build your dog's focus on you and is also great mental stimulation for your dog. It's also very handy to do if your dog loses focus/interest while working on another training exercise. Find it gives your dog something "to do" that earns immediate reinforcement.

Steps:

- Toss a treat on the ground within eye sight of the dog and cue "Find It."
- When the dog finishes eating the treat and turns back to you, immediately toss another treat and cue "Find It" again.
- Repeat a few times until the dog is automatically looking for the treat when you give the cue.



## Down

**Explain:** Teaching your dog to lie down on cue is a foundation for teaching impulse control and relaxation. You can capture the behavior or jump start it with a lure. You can also teach down both from a sitting position and from a standing position, and we'll work on both techniques.

### Down – From a Sit

Steps:

- To capture: Wait for the dog to lie down, then mark and treat.
- To lure: Hold a treat in front of the dog's nose, move it slowly down, from his nose to his paws and then very slightly forward along the ground.
- When the dog lies down (when elbows touch the ground), mark and treat.

### Down – From a Stand

Steps:

- To capture: Wait for the dog to lie down, then mark and treat.
- To lure: There are two options for luring the dog to "fold back into a down."
- Option 1: Lure between the dog's front legs
  - Move the treat back between the dog's front legs. The dog will likely lower his head and attempt to nibble the treat and fold back into the down position.
  - If the dog doesn't lie down, try luring using a slightly different angle. If the dog still will not lie down, try Option 2.
- Option 2: The "leg bridge" method
  - Sit on the ground and bend one leg (with your foot flat on the floor).
  - Hold the treat at the dog's nose and lure him under your leg. When he lowers his body to "crawl" under the leg bridge, mark and treat.
  - After a few successful trials, fade out the "leg bridge" and try Option 1.

## Stand (on cue)

**Explain:** Being able to ask your dog to "stand" in response to a cue is useful for clipping on a leash or harness, wiping muddy paws, even for veterinary exams and grooming.

Steps:

- With the dog seated, cue with your hand (target) slightly in front of the dog's face to encourage the dog to move from a sit position to standing. When the dog stands, mark and treat.
- Feed so that the dog's head is parallel with the ground. If you feed too high the dog will likely sit, if you feed too low the dog will likely lie down.
- At first, mark and treat any brief stands, then begin to mark and treat for a few seconds of "stillness" in the standing position.

## Lift

**Explain:** Lift is teaching your dog to sit from a down position. From your dog's viewpoint, this exercise is very different from sitting from a standing position – each behavior uses different muscle groups. Lift is a handy behavior in that you can cue your dog to get up, but to be seated, rather than standing or moving around.

Steps:

- With the dog in a down position, place the lure above the dog's head to encourage them to sit as they reach for the treat. When the dog sits, mark and treat.
- If the dog doesn't move into the sit position, note whether the dog is in a relaxed down (rolled over onto their hip). If yes, try luring the dog into a straighter down, and then repeat the first step above.

## Puppy Zen

**Explain:** This is a great exercise to teach impulse control; the art of giving up what you want in order to get it! Your dog will learn that patience is very reinforcing. This exercise is also a foundation for teaching "Not Yours!"

Note: Break this exercise into three steps.

Step 1: Capture the initial back-off from food

- Start with a treat in your hand and let the dog sniff it. Then make a fist around the treat. The dog will likely sniff, paw, and/or mouth at the treat.
- Wait until the dog stops trying to get the treat (e.g., looking away, taking a step back) then mark and treat.
- Repeat a few times, marking and treating when the dog is not trying to get the treat.
- Continue to practice until the dog will ignore the treat in your closed hand.

Step 2: Build duration

- Once the dog is reliably backing off from the offered food, begin to build duration (the length of time the dog will ignore the food).
- Offer the food as you did in Step 1, but wait a second or two longer before marking and treating.
- Continue to practice, building duration in small increments of time to avoid frustrating the dog.

Step 3: Capture eye contact/check in

- Once the dog can ignore food for a short duration, raise the food hand out to your side.
- The dog will likely look at your hand first. Observe and be ready to mark the moment the dog looks at your eyes instead of your hand, and deliver a treat.
- Practice with food in the opposite hand, then try it with food in both hands.

## Touch – Post-it Note

**Explain:** We're building on a behavior your dog already knows – Touch. Want to teach your dog to close the door? Turn off the lights? This will enable you to do that! This behavior is also useful for teaching dogs to interact with new objects, teaching distance behaviors such as go to a mat.

Steps:

- Stick a post-it note on the end of your fingers and offer your hand close to the dog's nose. As soon as the dog moves his nose toward your hand, mark and treat.
- If the dog does not touch the post-it note, try holding a treat along with the note for a couple of repetitions.
- Once the dog understands to touch the post-it note, try placing it on a different surface, like a chair.
- Continue to practice until the dog will move a short distance in order to touch the post-it note.
- Next, try placing the post-in in different locations or on different objects.

## Touch – Go Say Hello

**Explain:** The goal for this exercise is to teach the dog to greet people politely. With practice, your dog will greet people, then turn his attention back to you.

Note: This takes two people; the handler and the "greeter" (the person their dog is going to say hello to).

Steps:

- As you approach the greeter, cue the dog to "Go say hello." The greeter should offer his or her hand for the dog to touch.
- When the dog touches the greeter's hand, mark and treat, giving the treat close to your body.
- Practice "saying hello" to other people in the class.

## Gotcha!

**Explain:** Gotcha! is an exercise to get dogs comfortable having their collar held. By practicing this skill, your dog will be less likely to be startled or fearful if you ever need to hold onto him or direct him by his collar.

Steps:

- With a treat in hand, gently reach for the dog's collar and feed the treat as you say, "Gotcha!"
- If the dog is comfortable, and doesn't shy away from your hand, continue to practice, sometimes holding the collar a little longer, sometimes walking a few steps while gently holding the collar.
- If the dog stops eating the treat or shies away from your hand, discontinue the exercise as the dog is likely stressed. Try again, though this time reach only half way toward the collar (without touching the collar) or try again later in a less stressful environment.

### Additional variations

Once a dog has developed an understanding that the cue "Gotcha" means a collar touch, you can utilize the same cue to teach other variations.

Note: During all of these exercises, always remain observant of the dog's body language and work at the dog's pace and comfort level.

- Gotcha! Paw
  - Begin by saying the cue and either reaching toward the dog's paw, or running your hand down the dog's leg toward a paw. Mark and treat.
- Gotcha! Bum
  - Begin by saying the cue and reaching out to scratch the dog's rear end. Mark and treat.
- Gotcha! Nose
  - Begin by saying the cue and gently touching the nose. Mark and treat. Continue to practice, working toward getting the dog comfortable with having the muzzle and mouth touched.

## Polite Leash Walking

**Explain:** Polite leash walking is a goal of every dog owner everywhere! Being able to walk with a loose leash, but still letting the dog enjoy the walk, is the aim of this exercise. We're going to start with Box Step, which is the precursor for teaching Polite Walking. It's designed to help teach your dog to stay near you (without pulling) and move with you every step while maintaining a loose leash, which means the leash clasp is hanging down and there is a "J" shape in the leash running from your hands to the dog's leash clasp. Then we'll move on to forward walking.

### Intro to Polite Leash Walking – Box Step

Steps:

- Start with the dog standing in front of you. When the dog is standing still AND the leash is loose (with clasp hanging down), mark and treat.
- Repeat a few times, marking and treating at a very high rate of reinforcement (every second or two).
- Next, begin the Box Step – taking tiny steps in all directions.
- First, take one tiny step to the right. The dog may or may not move with you, but as long as the clasp is hanging down and the leash is loose, mark and treat.
- Next, take a tiny step to the left; mark and treat.
- Then a tiny step back; mark and treat.
- Finally, step forward; mark and treat.

### Polite Leash Walking

Note: Deliver treats at your pant seam throughout this exercise as this is the preferred position for your dog.

Steps:

- Stand with your elbows close to your torso, hands in a neutral position, with the dog on your left side (or right, if you prefer) and the leash loose, mark and treat several times.
- Take one step forward, and as the dog moves with you, mark and treat.
- Repeat, taking one step forward and as the dog moves with you, mark and treat.
- Continue to practice, marking and treating the dog (at a high rate of reinforcement) for each successive step you take while the leash remains loose. Speak to the dog in a happy, encouraging tone of voice. The leash is just for safety, so do not tug, drag, or pull your dog on the leash.
- If the dog lunges and pulls on the leash, stop, and stand still while keeping gentle pressure on the leash. Do not attempt to pull the dog back to you. The moment the dog stops and looks back toward you, mark and treat, and continue.
- As the dog makes progress and is eagerly walking at or near your side, you can begin to mark and treat every few steps.

## Trade Ya! (with toys)

**Explain:** Resource guarding (protecting things of value) is a very normal, natural behavior in dogs. This exercise teaches your dog that giving up a valued item is reinforcing. Trade Ya! is a useful behavior both for play (bring me the toy, drop it, and I'll throw it again), and in the event your dog has an item he shouldn't have.

Note: Some dogs will not be focused enough to play in a class setting, but you can still introduce this exercise in class and then encourage practice at home.

Steps:

- Start with two matching toys (e.g., tug or squeaky toys). Engage the dog in one of the toys.
- When the dog is holding the toy, cue "Trade Ya," and excitedly entice the dog to play with the second toy.
- The instant the dog releases the first toy to play with the second toy, mark and continue play with the new toy.
- Repeat a few times until you see the dog willingly dropping one toy to play with another.

## Not Yours!

**Explain:** This exercise teaches your dog to ignore or leave alone things you do not wish them to have.

Steps:

- Select an item that the dog will likely find uninteresting, show it to the dog.
- Place the item on a chair or bench, and cover it with your hand. If the dog ignores the item, mark and treat.
- Next try placing the item on the chair without covering it with your hand. If the dog ignores the item, mark and treat. If not, go back to the previous step and practice.
- When the dog is successfully ignoring the uncovered item, place it on the ground and repeat the earlier steps.
- Once the dog understands the concept, begin cueing "Not Yours" as you place the object.
- Finally, repeat all of the steps with low-value food. When you mark and treat, feed a higher-value treat from your bait bag, not the food you've just cued the dog to ignore.

## Come When Called – “Here”

**Explain:** Having a reliable recall is the dream of all dog owners, and when we break it down and keep practice sessions fun, dogs develop a deep history of reinforcement with the behavior.

**Note:** We use the word “Here” rather than “Come” as many clients over-use the word “Come,” and their dogs may or may not understand the behavior. So introducing a new cue enables you to successfully re-teach the behavior.

Steps:

- Say “Here,” and treat. Repeat at least 10 times (you’re helping the dog learn through association that the word “here” has value).
- Next, cue “here” and look for any small movements from the dog (an ear flick, a head turn, a head lift), mark and treat.
- Continue to practice, alternating positions from which you cue in order to slowly build distance.

## Give Paw

**Explain:** A great exercise to help get your dog comfortable with you holding a paw, plus, it’s an adorable trick to show your friends! This behavior can be jump started with a lure and then shaped.

Steps:

- To lure: Start with the dog in a sit. Lure the dog’s head to one side and watch for a weight shift off of one of the front paws, mark and treat.
- Repeat a few times, observing closely to see when the dog starts to lift one paw slightly off the ground, mark and treat.
- Continue to practice, slowly building height by marking and treating when the dog’s paw is slightly higher.
- Practice the same steps with the other paw.

## Wait

**Explain:** Teaching your dog to wait – to simply pause in place – is useful in a variety of circumstances, including waiting at door thresholds, waiting as you deliver food, waiting to get out of the car, the bathtub, etc. We'll work on two versions of wait; food bowl and doorways.

### Wait – Food Bowl Politeness

Note: You can provide students with disposable bowls, use bowls you have on hand, or have students bring a bowl from home.

Steps:

- Put a few treats into the bowl and stand still. Watch for the dog to either sit or offer some other still body position, then lower the bowl toward the ground.
- If the dog waits politely, say your release cue and let him eat the treats from the bowl.
- If the dog gets up before you can lower the bowl to the ground, stand back up, and raise the bowl back to the starting position.
- If the dog can't initially wait patiently until the bowl is all the way to the ground, you can help him to be successful by saying your release cue when the bowl is close to the ground. Continue to practice until the dog can wait politely until the bowl is placed on the ground.

### Wait - Doorway Politeness

Note: Clients should always use a leash for safety while teaching this behavior.

Steps:

- Cue the dog to sit, stand, or lie down near the door, and when the dog is still, mark and treat.
- Reach for the doorknob, if the dog remains still, treat. If he gets up, wait for him to be still and try again. Continue to practice until the dog can remain still while you reach for and touch the doorknob.
- Next, open the door a crack, if the dog remains still, mark and treat. If he gets up, close the door. Practice a few more times until the dog remains still while you open the door a crack.
- Now begin to open the door a little wider. When the dog remains still, say your release cue and let the dog go out the door.
- Continue to practice, alternating between sometimes releasing the dog to go through door, other times closing the door without releasing the dog (but still treating).



# Games

## Join Up

**Explain:** This game reinforces your dog for positioning himself beside or behind you (rather than out in front of you), which is a valuable foundation when teaching polite leash walking. Introduce this game during class, and encourage handlers to practice at home without their leash.

**Note:** These instructions assume the handler would like the dog on their left side. If a handler prefers the dog on their right side, reverse these instructions.

**Steps:**

- Hold the leash in the right hand, and ten treats in the left hand.
- Place one treat at a time, in rapid succession, on the ground directly behind your feet. Stand still while the dog eats the treats.
- When the dog is finished eating the treats, toss one more treat behind you.
- As soon as the dog finishes eating, he's likely to look at you, be ready to mark and then toss another treat behind you.
- Next, take one step forward while the dog eats the treat. Be ready to mark as the dog moves toward you, and deliver a treat just behind your left foot. Repeat a few times.
- Once the dog is reliably moving forward with you and eating the treat behind your left foot, begin to take two steps forward, then three, and so on.

## Cookie Toss Game (for Name Recognition)

**Explain:** This is a game to practice the Name Recognition behavior.

**Steps:**

- Toss a low-value treat a few feet away from the dog, let him eat the treat.
- As soon as the dog is finished eating, say the dog's name. If he looks at you, mark and treat with a high-value treat. Deliver the treat close to your body.
- Repeat a few times, practicing tossing the treat in different directions until the dog is reliably responding to his name.

## Cookie Toss Game (with new cue, “Here”)

**Explain:** This is another variation of the cookie toss game to practice responding to the cue “here.”

Steps:

- Toss a low-value treat a few feet away from the dog, let him eat the treat.
- As soon as the dog is finished eating, cue “here.” If he looks at you, mark and treat with a high-value treat. Deliver the treat close to your body.
- Repeat a few times, practicing tossing the treat in different directions until the dog is reliably responding to the cue.

## Here (Restrained Recall)

Note: This takes two people, the person restraining the dog and the handler (who is calling the dog).

**Explain:** This exercise builds on the earlier recall exercises. By gently restraining the dog, the dog is usually more eager to move toward the handler.

Set up the space to ensure safety of all participants. Use long lines, or alternatively, the person restraining the dog should be prepared to run along with the dog toward the handler. Determine how far away the handler should go before calling the dog (based both on dog’s history with recall and the current level of distractions).

Steps:

- Hold the dog while the handler shows him some yummy treats. Have the handler cue “here” while quickly moving away from the dog.
- After a second or two, allow the dog to move toward the handler. The handler should mark as the dog is approaching and then treat when the dog arrives.
- Practice at different distances, and periodically include “Gotcha” (practice holding the collar) as the dog gets to the handler.