

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-dependent adult or adolescent dog the exercise will assist in improving the dog’s ability to cope with stress generally, providing some relief of anxiety.

Additionally, experience will show the dog or puppy 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.



The progression of the tie-up exercise is a programme in desensitisation and as such we start at the easiest possible level. Attach the dog to a short lead (approximately 40 – 60 centimetres) tied to the leg of the chair upon which you are sitting.

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.

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 any 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 any

stress at all. Now you might 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 should only be granted when the dog is relaxed and has been for at least ten seconds.

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.

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.

For many dogs the first level will not induce any stress at all, but we could not have predicted this with 100% accuracy. In fact, for many dogs, it may be several levels into the programme before we observe any level of stress.

Look for signs of stress in the dog such as yawning, licking their lips, panting and an inability to settle. Do not progress to the next level until these signs are no longer present at the current level.

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.

Our aim is to expose the dog to situations that induce only a very mild level of stress. Inducing moderate or extreme stress increases the chance of distressing the dog or puppy and developing sensitisation rather than desensitisation.

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 duration 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, to assist maintain their independence.

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 calmly accepting 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.

To prove a point, I drove my Border Collie, Chilli, to a park where he had never been before and tied him to a post (with an out-of-sight observer for safety) and then drove off. The observer reported that Chilli watched me drive away and then settled in for a snooze. When I returned, he was happy to see me but not beside himself with relief. I am satisfied that I have raised my dog to be able to cope with most things that life may throw at 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.



I would like all puppies and dogs to ponder the restraint exercise as having no rhyme or reason, it just happens.... regularly.

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.

Tip!

For puppies and dogs not coping with being shut outside on their own or enclosed in a small room such as a laundry; the tie-up exercise is a great means of gradually introducing these scenarios.

Example:

- *Start the tie-up inside but near the back door;*
- *Progress to tie-up just outside the back door with the door open;*
- *Gradually increase handler distance from the tie-up position;*
- *Vary the tie-up location outside the back door;*
- *Introduce the handler stepping out of sight but returning immediately;*
- *Gradually increase the duration that handler is out of sight;*
- *Gradually reduce the door opening;*
- *Close the door briefly;*
- *Gradually increase the duration of door closed;*
- *Leave dog outside closed door without tie-up.*

Notes by Vicki Austin, CPDT-KA, Canine Behaviour and Training vickiaustin.com.au