



AN 'EMERGENCY STOP' COULD SAVE A DOG'S LIFE:

In an emergency situation, stopping a dog's forward motion from a distance could save his life! There are many different situations and reasons for using an emergency stop cue. Some possible situations include:

- Your dog has gotten loose and is across a street when he sees you and starts toward you. Traffic is coming so you want him to stop and wait till it's safe to cross or until you can go to him.
- Your dog has seen some wildlife, livestock or another animal and has started to chase, possibly toward a cliff, street, body of water or other unsafe location.
- While walking off lead, your dog is getting too far ahead of you and is about to turn a corner on the trail. Once he turns the corner, he will be out of your sight
- Your dog unexpectedly jumps out of your car before you are ready. You are not able to grab the leash before he sees a squirrel or other animal on the other side of the parking lot or street
- Your dog is running toward a low wall and is about to jump it, not realizing there is a long drop on the other side
- Your dog gets loose after an auto accident and is running around on the highway. Rescue workers want to help the dog but need to stop him first. The universal hand signal to stop could save his life.
- After a disaster, your dog has gotten loose and is wandering. Rescue workers find your dog, but it is not safe for the dog to come to them. The universal hand signal to stop could save his life.

TEACHING THE 'EMERGENCY STOP':

It's important to teach the dog both the hand signal and verbal cue to tell him to stop. Choose a word you are likely to yell and will be top of mind in an emergency situation. Try to use something common that most people might yell in that situation like "stop!", "wait!", "halt!" or "freeze!"

Once you know what you want to call the behavior, you need to teach the dog that the word has meaning and give the dog a motivation to respond to it. Since dogs don't understand English, you need to combine the cue with an action to help the dog understand what it means.

You may decide that you want to teach the dog to lie down fast instead of just stopping when he is moving away from you. If so, be sure you teach that before working on any of the moving exercises. Once your dog has a super-fast 'down', then substitute that behavior whenever the dog 'stops' in the exercises below

The following steps will help you to teach this skill to the dog. Be sure you have a clicker and plenty of treats prior to beginning your training.

1. Start with the dog on a leash, preferably in heel position as you walk.
2. Walk a few steps, say 'stop' and then immediately stop. You want the cue to predict the stop rather than your body movements.
3. Do several repetitions of this until the dog responds well to the 'stop' cue.



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4. If the dog doesn't seem to be understanding, you'll need to be sure that your timing is correct and that you are providing the 'click' only when the dog is completely still.
5. If the dog is swinging his hind end out so he can face you that's okay. You just want him to stop moving.
6. Practice this in a few different locations and during a few different training sessions.
7. Don't forget the reward for stopping; this is the start of the "reward history" for the behavior. It is this history of having the behavior rewarded that will help create the motivation to do the behavior later when you might not have a reward available.
8. Now have the dog walk on your other side and repeat the exercise above. It's likely that the dog won't have as solid a response at first since the perspective is new. The dog should progress quickly though.
9. Once the dog is responding on both sides, start to click and reward only for a fast response. If the dog is slow to respond, simply say "thank you" and start walking again. If the dog is quick to respond and stops fully as fast as possible, click and reward. Gradually increase the length of time the dog needs to remain still prior to the reward. This will help teach the dog that 'stop' means both 'stop' and 'stay still'.

NOW LET THE DOG MOVE IN FRONT OF YOU:

The dog should have a firm understanding of what the 'stop' cue means before proceeding. Next, you'll use the cue when the dog is walking in front of you on a loose lead. On a loose lead, the dog has a lot more room to move about, thus more room for error and slow responses. You should only proceed to this stage when the dog is performing rapid stops on a short lead by the cue only. He should not rely on your body movements or a slowing pace. When the dog stops, go to the dog to reward him. Don't have the dog come to you. If the dog is taught to stop and then come to you for the reward, it will make later distance work more difficult. It also makes the 'stay still' part less clear for the dog. If the dog moves as you approach, take a step away from the dog and re-cue the stop. Only move forward with the reward when the dog stays still until you get to him. If you have to do this multiple times, back up to the shorter leash for several more repetitions while varying the length of the 'stay still' part of the 'stop' behavior.

THE IMPLIED 'STAY IN PLACE':

Using a loose leash as above is the beginning of teaching the skill at a distance. When the dog is doing well and responding quickly to the cue when he's at the end of the leash, he is ready for the next step. Put the dog in heel position. Cue the stop (the dog should stop) but keep moving a step or two past the dog. If the dog stays still, return to the dog and reward. If the dog moves after you pass by, say "oops" or another No Reward Marker (NRM), and then try it again. Vary the distance you go past the dog by starting with a short distance in front of the dog and progressing slowly to longer and longer distances. Many dogs are not comfortable staying in place as you walk away, so don't push this too fast if your dog is often breaking the implied stay.

GETTING MORE DISTANCE:

Once the dog understands that he should stay in place as you continue past him, he is ready for the next step. Put the dog on a long line of 25 to 50 feet and repeat the loose leash exercise above with the dog



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ahead of you. The cue should come when you stop but before he reaches the end of the line. If the dog is moving quickly, give him enough line to respond without receiving a jerk. The line is simply a reminder to the dog and provides you to control the dog in the environment. The cue is given before you make any physical indication that you are about to stop. Vary the length of the line so that the dog doesn't know when the stop cue will happen. When you give the cue, the dog should stop and wait for you to come to him and deliver a reward. Don't let the dog come to you for the reward.

REVERSE THE PICTURE:

By now, the dog should have a firm understanding of what the 'stop' cue means, and he should stop and not move until he is reached by an approaching person or until told to move. Now his task becomes more difficult as he will be required to stop in place immediately when cued when he is coming toward you rather than when he is moving away.

It's easiest to work on the next step if you have someone to help you. Attach the long line to the dog and start with him about 10-15 away on a stay near the helper. Have the helper hold the line so that the dog has only have the distance to you available, meaning if you are 10' away the line is held so that he only has 5' of line. If the dog tends to move very quickly when recalled, you'll need to give him more line so that he has time to react to the cue before he gets to you.

When ready, call the dog then give the hand signal just before you cue the dog to 'stop'. The helper is simply a back up to help the dog understand the cue in this new context and should NOT jerk the dog if he responds slowly. You are asking the dog to use the known cue in a new context, so it might take the dog a few tries to fully understands that stop still means stop, even when given during a recall and moving toward rather than away from you.

Having your helper hold the line helps remind the dog to stay in place to wait for you instead of going to you for the reward. As you practice, vary the distance the dog travels before being told to stop. You don't want the dog to anticipate that he should always stop when he is half the distance between you and the helper. You also want to vary the length of time the dog needs to remain stopped before you approach to reward.

ADDING THE UNIVERSAL SIGN FOR STOP:

You want the dog to understand the universal sign for stop so that he is able to stop when someone other than you tells him to. The sign for stop, hand held flexed at the wrist with the arm fully extended and the fingers fully extended towards the sky, is natural for most people.

Introduce the hand signal just before you give the verbal cue so that the dog will start to use the hand signal to anticipate the known verbal stop cue. If the cues are used simultaneously, the dog is simply able to ignore the unknown cue. After lots of practice, during different sessions in different locations, you can test to see if your dog knows the hand signal. Go to a new location and for the first practice run, use only the hand signal. It is important that the dog understand this hand signal so that strangers can keep the dog safe even if they don't know the cue you chose to use. It has the added benefit of stopping



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your dog if he is approaching someone that doesn't like dogs when the person uses the signal to try to stop the dog's approach.

NEXT STEPS:

The dog should go through all of the above steps before a recall or other 'you are free to move now' type cue is added after the 'stop' cue. You want to make sure that the 'stay still' part of the 'stop' cue is always very clear to the dog.

If your dog has successfully moved through all of the exercises above, you have taught him a very important new cue. Just like with any new skill, you'll need to practice the 'emergency stop' with the dog to ensure that it stays fresh in his mind. With practice, you can be confident that your dog will respond to the cue immediately in situations where it might save his life!

You have taught your dog a new cue! Now you just need to practice on occasion to keep it fresh in the dog's mind