



Lincoln Land Animal Clinic, Ltd.
Animal Behavior Services
Colleen S. Koch, DVM
1150 Tendick St.
Jacksonville, IL 62650
217-245-9508
www.lincolnlandac.com
llanimalclinic@yahoo.com

Teaching Go To Mat

Lesson description:

The goal of this exercise is to shape the behavior of settling on a mat, bed, or blanket. Training this behavior helps pets learn to lie down, rest, and wait calmly and patiently.

Learning goals: You will see how having a place to settle, that is movable will allow your pet to settle in various locations and during distractions. Being rewarded for going to a certain place- encourages the pet to seek the place of reward.

It is a foundation behavior that can be applied to quiet kenneling, doorbell etiquette, as well as the first step to teaching a pet to be alone. This behavior is useful in every species as a way to teach them to what to do and where to go.

Training plan:

Part 1 getting the pet to the mat (perch, rug, blanket, spot)

- Place a mat on the floor.
- Click the pet's first movement toward the mat and treat (c/t).
- Continue to click any contact or interaction with the mat.
- Toss treats in different places to reset the pet for another interaction with the mat. (It might be easier for some species to place the treat in a bowl).
- Move the mat just a little bit. Continue to c/t any interaction with the mat.
- Once the pet is reliably standing on the mat, begin to shape the pet to lie* down. Initially you will be clicking the pet for sitting, head bobs, or elbows bending, paw extended forward etc.
- Continue to slowly raise criteria until the pet lies down on the mat.

* Lying is difficult for some species. Substitute a calm behavior, such as standing with a lowered head.

Part 2 Adding the cue:

- If this is a new session- make sure you start at a point of success (a place you know your pet knows). It is a good idea to begin by warming up by c/t your pet for lying down on the mat. Toss the treats away from mat to reset the pet.
- To add a cue you will toss the treat away from mat, as the pet begins to move to the mat give your cue, "go to mat". C/t correct movement.

- Gradually move a few steps away from the mat.
- As soon as the pet moves toward the mat give the cue, c/t correct responses. Repeat 3-4 times.
- Repeat above and wait for the pet to lie down. C/t correct responses.
- Gradually move farther from the mat (no more than a few steps- ½ steps if needed to keep your pet successful), give the cue, and when the pet goes to the mat and lies down-c/t. Toss the treat away from the mat to reset the pet.
- If the pet is not successful, back up in the process to the exercise that your pet was successful. Repeat this step several times, and then proceed in smaller increments (perhaps ½ steps away).

Part 3 Making the mat a place your pet wants to stay

- After cueing your pet to “go to mat” increase the duration by rewarding the pet with a bone, stuffed kong, or species specific long lasting treat/food puzzle..
- Start introducing distractions of low enough intensity that the pet notices, but does not stop chewing/eating/licking.
- If the pet gets up or seems interested in the distraction, give the pet a higher value treat on the mat as well as decrease the intensity of the distraction.
- Decrease the distractions or intensity and begin to shape for longer duration.

Things to consider:

- Always start at a point of success.
- Tossing the treat away from the mat helps to reset the pet for another chance to get clicked.
- When you begin to work for duration on the mat and add distractions toss treats on the mat.
 - When adding distractions you may need to increase the value of the treat on the mat.
- End each session on a positive note.
- Move the mat to as many different locations to help generalize the cue.
- Ideally the pet will "go to mat" (located in a specific area of the house) when cued from anywhere in the house.
 - To accomplish this you would continue to cue gradually increasing distances from the mat.
 - Repeating this several times.
 - You will need to gradually increase the distance to any spot that you might cue "go to mat."
 - Some pets generalize quicker than others.
- Once you have moved the mat several places inside, teach "go to mat" outside on your door step.
- If you need help with other species please call our office.