



Do You Nag Your Dog?

Nagging Isn't Training

How many times have you asked your dog to Sit, **Sit, SIT!**, only to end up having to push his bum into a sit anyway? Nagging your dog only teaches your dog that he does not need to respond to the word 'Sit' until you push his bum to the ground.

My father has a beautiful 12 year old German Shepherd, named Sam. People love old dogs and Dad is often stopped on the street by people wanting to pat Sam. When they ask his name, to which Dad responds "His name is three Sams". Perplexed, people ask what he means. Dad explains that, if he wants Sam's attention, he needs to repeat "Sam, **Sam, SAM!**" Sam will only respond once he has heard his name for the third time in a rather stern tone of voice.



Dad is convinced that Sam is becoming deaf as he continues to age since he often now needs to hear his name four times before he will respond. However Sam will respond to 'Bikkie Bone' with zeal after just a single utterance! Deaf? I don't think so!

Repeating commands ad nauseam only serves to teach our dogs to ignore the command. He learns that you are willing to repeat commands hence; he does not need to 'Come' until you've said 'Come' six times. You are training your dog not to respond. Never issue a command that you know your dog will not respond to. What's the point? If he's not going to respond to the command anyway, then you are only teaching him to ignore you. If you find yourself issuing a command that your dog does not respond to be sure to enforce it with quiet insistence.

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Often people believe their dogs are stubborn, willful or stupid when nothing could be further from the truth. There are many reasons a dog will not obey a command and they include:

Dog has not been properly trained

Dogs do not generalise behaviour unless taught to do so. Put simply, this means that just because your dog will 'Sit' at home in the kitchen for a treat does not mean he knows what 'Sit' means when out on a walk. It is your responsibility to train your dog properly. Do not assume that he 'knows' a command until he will offer it in all situations. You need to teach your dog to comply in all situations and this is a process, it does not automatically happen.

The environment is too distracting or unsettling

If the environment around your dog is too distracting he may not be capable of listening to you. For example, if you are at a dog park (off leash area) and there are dogs acting wildly all around him, he might be too distracted to be able to comply. I like to think of this in terms of my husband watching football, he is incapable of engaging with me when there is a minute to go and scores are level! Also, if your dog is fearful or intimidated he will have trouble complying. Imagine someone telling you to calm down and stop screaming when you believe there is an axe murderer at your door!

The dog is sick or injured

I have experienced this with my own dog, Steve. One day in class I was demonstrating with him and asked him to 'Drop'. He averted his gaze away from me, flicked his tongue and blinked his eyes. These are common dog calming signals, he was telling me to calm down. I gave him a break and asked him to 'Drop' several minutes later, the same thing happened. Instead of getting angry with him I consulted with a vet immediately after class and was informed that Steve had a back injury.



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He was not being disobedient, he was in pain and could not comply. If your dog normally responds to a command in any given situation and all of sudden stops responding this may be an indication that he is unwell. Have him checked over by your vet.

The delivery of the command is different to normal

When issuing a command it is important that the delivery of the command be the same as usual. For example if you usually ask your dog to 'Sit' in a happy, upbeat tone of voice he may not recognise the command when bellowed in anger. Don't say 'Sit Down' when you mean 'Sit' or 'Come Here' when you mean 'Come', be consistent with your commands. Similarly when issuing a hand signal be sure that your body language is consistent or he may not understand you. Often people get lazy with hand signals and their dog stops responding. If your dog normally responds to a hand signal don't assume he will automatically understand the associated word.

You have taught him that commands are optional

This can happen when you nag your dog to perform commands as discussed earlier. Ideally, you should never issue a command that your dog will not comply with immediately. I call this 'One Cue = One Response'. If you find your dog is struggling with obeying commands, this is an indication that you need to do some more training. Do not ask your dog to do anything that he is not likely to do; it will only serve to teach your dog that commands are optional. For example, if you don't think your dog will 'Come' in certain situations ask him to 'Sit' instead and then go and get him rather than issue a command he will ignore. Then work on your 'Come' command as a separate exercise until he will respond in any situation. The worst thing you can do is repeat 'Come, Come, Come....'

Your dog associates something negative with the command

The most common example of this is the Recall (the 'Come' command).



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Too often most dog owners only call their dogs to 'Come' to end fun or to do something unpleasant to the dog.

Examples of this are:

- ✖ Calling your dog to 'Come' at the park, then snapping on his leash and taking him home
- ✖ Calling your dog to 'Come' to shove a worming or antibiotic tablet down his throat
- ✖ Calling your dog to 'Come' to give him a bath, go to the Vet etc
- ✖ Calling your dog to 'Come' to punish him, scold him etc

Is it any wonder that your dog stops coming when called? Would you continue to go to someone when the outcome was always negative? I know I certainly wouldn't!

Next time you find yourself nagging your dog stop and think about why you might be nagging:

- ✖ Is your dog incapable of responding due to stress or activity in the environment?
- ✖ Is he in pain?
- ✖ Has he been trained to respond in the situation in which you are requesting the behaviour?
- ✖ Have you associated the command with something negative?
- ✖ Are you delivering the command in the usual way?



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