FOUNDATIONAL CORE FOUR COMMANDS
EVERY DOG SHOULD KNOW

START HERE

Most behavior struggles—door rushing, leash pulling, ignoring commands, jumping on guests—don't come from stubborn dogs. They usually come from a lack of impulse control and clarity when working with our dogs. The Hierarchy of Commands is a framework that gives you clarity on which skills to train and which training games to use with your dog. These core commands build our dogs' training foundation and will improve their ability to listen around distractions.

IF YOU NEED ADDITIONAL HELP

Inside my [Foundational Four online program](#), I walk through how to teach and apply the four commands that form the backbone of this system:

• Leave It
• Place
• Recall
• Heel

The program includes step-by-step instructions, troubleshooting, and demonstrations with dogs of different ages and breeds so owners can apply the system in real-life situations.

You can learn more about the program here:

https://properpaws.thinkific.com/products/courses/FoundationalFourProgram

JUMP INTO THE GUIDE

The document below is interactive, meaning you can click links to view example videos and additional information.

LET'S GET STARTED

As you review each of the commands and games you will also need the following training items:

1. [6-foot leash](#)
2. [Flat collar](#)or harness
3. [High-value treats](#)
4. [Long lead (50 ft)](#)
5. [Place cot](#)

FOUNDATIONAL CORE FOUR COMMANDS

Before we dive deeper into each command, let's go over what they are:

1. Leave it
2. Recall
3. Heel
4. Place

These are the four commands every dog should know and where every owner should start when training their dogs. Now, let's dive deeper into each one.

LEAVE IT

The leave it command is one of the best ways to communicate to your dog what they can or can not engage with. Not only does this command keep your dog safe, but it also teaches them impulse control. Teaching "leave it" is about controlling the reinforcements of the dog's choice rather than trying to control the dog.

- Teaching the Command
  - [Video example of how to introduce the command](#)
  - [Written out directions in a blog](#)
- Teaching the behavior
  - [Challenging the behavior](#)
  - [Challenging the behavior in real-life](#)
    - It's not uncommon that we drop food while cooking in the

kitchen. However, the food we are cooking with may not always be safe for your dog. This is why I do not allow my dogs to pick up food just because it hits the ground. After you've trained your dog on the basics of Leave It, cooking a meal provides a great training opportunity. Next time you are cooking a meal safe for a dog, "accidentally" drop a piece of food and use this to practice your dog's leave it.

- [What is the difference between command & behaviors](#)?
  - When training your dog, you will want to focus on both the command and the behavior. While these two things sound the same, there is a difference. The difference is when working on the command, this is where you focus on your verbal control and your dog's understanding of the command (I.e. I say X you do Y.) When focusing on the behavior this is when we reward or pinpoint the choices our dogs make even when you don't give the command. When praising behaviors, this is also known as shaping or capturing, and it plays a large role in building habits.

How to transfer to real life:

Your dog's leave-it command is the foundation of their impulse control. It teaches your dog what they can not engage with (such as objects around the house, prey, or other distractions), teaches [a calm mindset when around distractions](#), and it's how you will [build successful off-leash skills.](#) This can also be used to redirect your dog when showing reactive behaviors in the following situations:

- [Knocks and doorbells](#)
- [Car driving by](#)
- [Objects around your house](#)
- [Around prey such as squirrels and birds](#)
- [Other animals such as cats](#)
- [Other dogs around you](#)
- [Wheeled objects such as bikes, skateboards, etc.](#)

RECALL

When introducing our dog's recall or their "come" command, start small and break it up. Start by teaching what we want when we say the "come" command so we can build that reliable quick turn toward you! We don't want to immediately start off-leash with your dog 50-100 feet away from you as they will be less likely to learn the command from that distance.

- Quick turn recall game
  - [Part one - The sequence of this game](#)
  - [Part two - example of the game](#)
- [Building on distance](#)
  - As you continue to challenge your dog on their quick turns, you can begin to make this game more "real-life" by introducing the same game outside, around distractions, and while adding more distance between you and your dog.
- [Teaching a sit at the end](#)
  - If your dog tends to blow past you when you call them, focus on teaching them to come to you and sit in front of you.
- [Structure vs. Unstructured Recalls](#)
  - When working on your dog's recall, there are two ways you want to practice the 'come' command—structured and unstructured. Structured is more along the lines of 'sit, stay, walk away, call them to you.' This is good practice, but it is not always real life. Unstructured recalls are more what I call "real life." This may be calling your dog off of a smell, or another dog or person around you or when you need to break their attention and have them come to you.
- [The importance of accountability.](#)
- [What if I can't hold accountability?](#)
  - When starting out teaching our puppies a recall, we want to ensure success as much as possible to prevent them from learning to ignore the command. If you can't guarantee your puppy will come when called, make a noise that will get their attention and excite them. Once they are running to you and you know they will follow through, give the "come" command and reward you when they get to you!
- [Make sure your whole family participates in the training](#)

How to transfer to real life:

When we work with recalls we often focus on calling dogs from a stay position or

when there are minimal to no distractions around us. However, when we are in a scenario such as our dog spots a squirrel, cat, another dog, or person they want to run towards, it's not uncommon for our recalls to fall short. This is often because we forget to teach our dog to call off a distraction they are running towards. This is something you will want to train for with the use of toys, your long lead, and high-value treats Here is an example video and additional tips to help: https://www.instagram.com/p/C1pLrJXMUmL/

HEEL

A proper heel will benefit your everyday life with your dog by making walks more enjoyable for you and your dog. Having a dog that heels is also proper etiquette when passing by other people and dogs.

- Reinforcement zone
  - When teaching our dogs how to heel, it's essential to teach them the reinforcement zone. This is how we teach them where we want them to be. By doing so, we teach our dogs to walk at our side, making loose leash walking much easier!
- Redirect Game
  - The redirect game is not only to help teach your dog how to heel but it is also an essential component when working on reactive behaviors.
  - How to turn when doing a redirect
- Using the redirect to break fixation
  - When teaching the redirect command, you reward your dog for turning towards you and catching you. Because of this, If your dog becomes fixated/reactive towards a trigger (dog, person, prey, etc.), your redirect command is an excellent way to get their attention back on you.
- How to build engagement
  - Often I am asked how I teach dogs to watch or continuously check in with their owners while in a heel – particularly when working around distractions. The answer is simple—you want to reward every time the dog looks at you!

How to transfer to real life:

When you are working with your dog, during the first week or two on heel, I would like for you to play your heeling games and work on the foundation of the command vs. taking your dog for a normal walk. By taking the time to teach the foundation, you can begin to build on the habits you are looking for. This will also help you build habits rather than teaching your dog to do well during "training time" and that they can still pull any other time. Once your dog gets better, you can begin to apply your training on your everyday walks.

PLACE

Place not only provides a spot for your dog to go to be out of the way when needed, but it also provides an outlet for your dog to settle down and relax regardless of the distractions around you.

- [Introducing the place command](#)
  - With practice and consistency, the 'place' command can become a location of relaxation and self-calming for our dogs - regardless of who or what is around them!
- [Teaching an implied down](#)
- [Introducing the release command](#)
- [Teaching the mindset](#)
  - There are two main components to teaching place. There is the command—teaching your dog to go to place and stay in place until they are released. Then there is the Mindset—our dogs should be calm and relaxed regardless of what is happening around them.
- [Introducing distractions](#)
  - If your dog is reactive to the sound of a doorbell, this is a great way to work on calmer behaviors and redirect them off of the distraction.
  - You can also [use items such as toys to work around "controlled distractions."](#)
- [Introducing the door](#)
  - Before you expect your dog(s) to hold the place command with guests at the door, it's essential to start small and build up to the more challenging scenario.
- [How to handle guests at the door.](#)
  - When teaching our dogs how to hold place with guests at the door, the

way we handle the guests also plays a factor in our dog's success.
- ○ [Importance of closing the door](#)

How to transfer to real life:

Place is a versatile command that can be used in several different scenarios such as:

- [Jumping on Guests](#)
- [Guests at the door](#)
- [Around kids playing](#)
- [When hosting guests](#)
- [When doors need to be left open](#)
- [Bringing in dogs from bad weather](#)

Once your dog understands these Foundational Core Four commands, you can continue to build its training by challenging the three D's (distance, duration, distractions) to form lasting behaviors and habits. You can also teach a calm mindset and additional commands that will benefit your dog's lifestyle.

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