



Matwork

The goal of matwork is to create a portable "island" of calm so that we can help the dog experience more calm states, then help them access calm in more environments because the mat is portable. Once they find out that calm behavior (and relaxed feelings) is something we value, and something that "pays", most dogs will begin to exhibit these behaviors more even outside training sessions- feeling good is addictive!

To build relaxation with matwork, we need to show the dog three things:

1

How to stabilize the body

2

How to feel on the mat

3

Nothing else matters

Matwork Part 2 How to Feel

Once your pup is comfortable with going to her mat and staying there, she will need to learn that the mat is her **ultimate vacation spot**. The rest of the world can be pretty demanding with things going on that he feels she has to check on and be in charge of, react to, and cues to follow. On the mat, though, **her only job is to rest and eat cookies**.

This phase is like **biofeedback**- teaching the dog how to practice **relaxed body language**, which then **encourages relaxation** in their physiology.

Reinforce (feed) for any behavior associated with relaxation, including

Breathing

Stillness

Blinking



Reduced focus on you

Lowering head

Muscle Softening

This is the most important part of matwork- what transforms it from a "fancy stay" into a powerful behavior modification technique that we can use to change the way a dog interacts with the world.

Deep Breaths

Smile!

Soft shoulders

Your body matters too!

Soft Gaze

Model the relaxation you want to see in your dog:

Relaxed facial muscles

Avoid eye contact

Slow reward movement

This process encourages relaxation in two ways:

- It shows the dog that **relaxation and stillness are something we value**
- It allows the dog to experience relaxation, which is internally reinforcing (that's why people do meditation and yoga!)

Deliver rewards directly on the mat, not from your hand.

Lower value rewards like kibble may be best for dogs that LOVE food.

Don't use your regular marker "yes"- either just feed or use a special calm reward marker.

Move to Matwork Part 3 when:

- Your dog begins to show relaxed body language within 30 seconds of laying on the mat
- They can comfortably hang out on the mat for at least 3 minutes with reinforcement every 15-20 seconds.