



# THE CALM DOG BLUEPRINT

2025

A Free Resource from the  
Ladies Working Dog Group



# WELCOME TO YOUR CALM DOG JOURNEY

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If you are reading this, you already care deeply about your dog — and you are committed to making your partnership work.

Working breeds, and high-drive dogs especially, are full of natural energy, intelligence, and instinct. These qualities make them incredible companions — but they also bring challenges. Overexcitement, distraction, and frustration are completely normal parts of living and training with an active dog.

*You are not doing it wrong. You are not behind.  
You and your dog are simply navigating a learning process that many owners quietly struggle with but few openly talk about.*

**The truth is, calm focus does not happen by accident.** It is not a sign of a "better dog" or "better trainer". It is the result of simple, practical habits repeated consistently over time.

This guide is designed to give you a clear, grounded starting point. No confusing jargon, no overwhelming theories — just five straightforward steps you can start using right away.

**Inside, you will learn how to:**

- Stay calm yourself, even when your dog's energy feels overwhelming
- Set up training sessions for success, not stress
- Help your dog focus even when the world is full of distractions
- Build a pattern of small, meaningful wins that boost confidence
- Reward connection and attentiveness, not just obedience

**This is not about creating a perfect dog.**

It is about building a resilient, trusting relationship that lasts a lifetime. Before we begin, take a moment to acknowledge how far you and your dog have already come. Even on the hard days, you are learning together.

Now, let's calmly walk through the next few steps — and see how small changes can create big, lasting results.

*Jo & Team LWDG xx*



# STEP 1:

## START CALM, STAY CALM

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*Before we ask anything of our dogs, we must first check in with ourselves.*

Dogs are highly attuned to our emotions, body language, and energy. If we bring frustration, urgency, or impatience into a training session, even unintentionally, our dogs will sense it — and often mirror it back.

When we start a session feeling flustered, rushed, or distracted, it sets a tone of tension. When we start calm, structured, and patient, we create an environment where our dog can think clearly and respond more easily.

**Calm is not passive. Calm is active leadership without force.**



*Practical Task: Today, before your next session or walk, pause at the door. Take three calm breaths. Ask yourself, "Am I setting the tone I want my dog to follow?" If not, give yourself permission to reset — and then start again, calmly.*

### Signs you are starting calmly:

- You take a moment to breathe and settle yourself before asking your dog to work.
- You give clear, deliberate instructions without raising your voice.
- You approach mistakes or misunderstandings with patience, not panic.
- You finish sessions while focus is still good, rather than pushing through when tiredness creeps in.

### Simple ways to build calm into your sessions:

- Before you open the door or unclip the lead, take three slow, deep breaths.
- Mentally run through what you want to work on, keeping your goals simple and achievable.
- If your dog begins to escalate in excitement, pause. Lower your own energy first. Give them a chance to settle before continuing.

### Training your own mindset is as important as training your dog's behaviour.

Consistency here builds trust: your dog learns you are steady, reliable, and worth tuning into — even when the world feels exciting or overwhelming.



# STEP 2:

## TRAIN LOW, WIN HIGH

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Most training problems do not start because the dog "doesn't know" what to do. They start because we accidentally ask too much, too soon, in an environment that overwhelms them.

**It is easy to feel confident when your dog performs perfectly in the garden or kitchen.** But as soon as the world gets bigger — the first field, the first public walk, the first busy space — focus falls apart.

**This is not failure.** This is a dog being honest about what they are ready to handle. The mistake most handlers make is assuming that because a behaviour is good at home, it should immediately work everywhere else.

In reality, dogs need slow, steady proofing: a behaviour must be rehearsed successfully across many different environments before it becomes reliable.

### What 'Training Low' Looks Like:

- Teaching or reinforcing behaviours in places with very few distractions.
- Using environments where the dog feels safe and successful.
- Keeping early sessions short and easy, focusing on success rather than perfection.



#### Practical Task:

*Choose one behaviour your dog knows well (e.g., a sit, a recall, or a heel position). Today, practise it in an easier environment than you usually would. Focus only on making it easy and rewarding — and notice how much more engaged your dog feels.*

### What 'Winning High' Means:

- Gradually asking for the same behaviours in slightly more challenging settings.
- Always setting the dog up to succeed, not to fail.
- Recognising when an environment is too overwhelming — and scaling it back without shame.

Progress comes not from throwing the dog into harder and harder tests, but from building small victories that create lasting confidence.

### Simple examples of building up training environments:

- Start inside the home → move to the garden → progress to a quiet field → then a quiet woodland.
- Start with no dogs around → add a calm dog in the distance → then introduce movement nearby.
- Start with one cue per session → then chain two cues together once confidence grows.

Training low and winning high keeps the dog feeling capable — and keeps you feeling calm, not constantly battling for their attention.



# STEP 3: ONE COMMAND, ONE RESPONSE

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*Practical Task: Today, choose one simple command — perhaps "sit" or "come."*

*Say it once, then give your dog a full five seconds to respond before doing anything else. Notice how often your dog simply needs a little more thinking time rather than more words.*

When a dog is overexcited or distracted, it is tempting to repeat commands.

We say "sit, sit, sit" or "come here, come on" without realising we are training them to wait for the third or fourth command — or to ignore us altogether.

Every time we repeat, we accidentally teach the dog that our first instruction does not matter. Clear communication means saying one command once — and helping the dog succeed if they struggle, without nagging or raising our voice.

## **How Repetition Undermines Training:**

- The dog learns that ignoring you is normal.
- Your words lose meaning and urgency.
- You become background noise rather than clear leadership.

## **Building Better Listening:**

- Give the command once, calmly and clearly.
- Give the dog time to process and respond (especially if distractions are high).
- If the dog does not respond, calmly step in to guide them — using a line, body positioning, or resetting the task without frustration.

This approach builds a dog who knows that listening the first time is expected — and safe. Dogs thrive on consistency. They do not need shouting; they need steady, reliable instructions that they understand and trust.

## **Simple ways to practise this:**

- Use a consistent tone — firm, but not forceful.
- Pause after you give a cue. Let the dog think.
- Resist the urge to rush or repeat, even if you feel uncomfortable in the silence.

*Patience teaches the dog to work through distraction, rather than giving up or tuning out.*



# STEP 4:

## SMALL WINS MATTER

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**In dog training, progress is rarely a straight line.**

Expecting big leaps forward every session only sets you — and your dog — up for frustration. Dogs learn best when they experience regular success.

Small wins, repeated often, create strong, lasting behaviours far better than occasional breakthroughs followed by confusion.

*When we focus on building confidence step-by-step, we develop a dog that trusts learning, trusts training — and trusts us.*

### **What Small Wins Look Like:**

- A calm sit when usually there is bouncing.
- One successful recall after struggling the day before.
- A short, focused heelwork session before excitement bubbles over.

Celebrate these wins quietly but warmly. They are not "minor" — they are the building blocks of your long-term partnership.

### **Avoid Overloading Your Dog:**

- End training sessions before your dogs focus fades.
- Work on one or two small goals per session.
- Finish on a success, even if it feels like stopping too soon.

### **Consistency matters more than complexity.**

A short session of success will always beat a long session that ends in struggle. Simple example of a small win focus: Instead of walking your entire usual route, today aim for the first two minutes of calm walking, then reward and end the session. Build from there.

**Training is not a race. It is a layering of skills, trust, and understanding.**



**Practical Task:** Today, set a single, simple goal for your dog — no more than one clear behaviour at a time. When your dog succeeds, celebrate that win and stop the session for a moment. Notice how much more positive and motivated your dog feels when they are set up to succeed.



# STEP 5: REWARD THEM LOOKING AT YOU

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*Practical Task: Today, spend five minutes simply watching for your dog to voluntarily look at you. When they do, calmly mark it with a "good" and reward quietly. Notice how, with very little effort, you begin to shift their focus back onto you without force.*

**Focus is not automatic.** It must be encouraged and rewarded, just like any other behaviour. Many handlers only reward their dog once a command has been completed — after the sit, after the recall, after the retrieve.

But if we wait until the task is finished to reward attention, we miss the critical moments when the dog chooses to tune in. If you want a dog who checks in with you regularly, you must make checking in worthwhile.

## **Why Eye Contact Matters:**

- It shows your dog is thinking about you, not just the environment.
- It gives you a window to give a cue while they are receptive.
- It builds an invisible thread of communication between you and your dog.

## **How to Reward Focus, Not Just Obedience:**

- When your dog looks at you without being asked, quietly acknowledge it — a soft "good," a gentle treat, or a brief stroke.
- Avoid flooding them with too much excitement. Calm, steady rewards build calm, steady attention.
- Watch for small moments: a glance up, an ear flick towards you, a slight pause.

Over time, your dog will learn that choosing to check in is always valuable, even before being asked. This creates a dog who wants to stay connected — not just a dog who responds under pressure.

## **Simple ways to encourage more focus:**

- Reward the first glance towards you at the start of every session.
- End some walks or training games simply for great attention, not for completing a task.
- Carry high-value treats quietly, rewarding without turning everything into a high-energy event.

Attention is the true foundation for all further training. Protect it, nurture it, and it will serve you both for life.





# YOU AND YOUR DOG ARE LEARNING TOGETHER

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If there is one truth to hold onto from this guide, it is this: **Calm focus is not a natural gift.**

It is a skill, built slowly through shared experiences, small steps, and quiet leadership. Your dog's excitement, their moments of distraction, their struggles to listen — these are not signs that you have failed.

They are signs that your dog is learning, that you are stretching their world, and that both of you are growing.

It is easy to compare your journey to others. It is easy to think you should be further along, or that you must be doing something wrong.

*You are not behind.*

You are simply building a foundation the right way — with patience, consistency, and care.

Keep choosing small wins. Keep rewarding focus and connection. Keep remembering that every session, every walk, every little interaction is part of the relationship you are building. There is no rush.

**Choose progression over perfection.** There is only today's opportunity to build trust and confidence — one calm step at a time.



**You do not have to figure this out alone,**

*You were never meant to.*

**Join The Ladies Working Dog Group today and take your next step with calm support behind you.**

## An Invitation to Keep Going:

If you found value in these simple steps, imagine what consistent support, structured advice, and a welcoming community could offer you.

The Ladies Working Dog Group is here to support every part of your journey — whether you are training for the field, the family, or simply a calmer everyday life with your dog.

## Inside our free community, you will find:

- Training resources that meet you where you are
- Kind, no-judgement advice for every stage
- A network of women who understand the real-world challenges of living and working with active dogs