

# BOUNDARIES

Dogs know boundaries. They teach it to one another all the time. Watch dogs playing – if one dog needs a “time out” from play it will signal to the other to “keep away” which is simply one dog saying to another “I need my space for a moment, do not approach”. The dog that is requesting the time out is telling the other dog to keep out of it’s space. A boundary has been set around the resting dog.

You can easily teach your dog to stay out of the kitchen when you are cooking, or stay away from the table when you are eating, or “go to mat” when company arrives, or stay in the yard, keep out of the garden, go through the doorway only when released. The applications for a boundary are endless!

A dog that does not have clear boundaries will make up it’s own boundaries. We must teach our dogs that we understand boundaries too, and then teach them which boundaries are important to us. Remember too that everything you teach your dog will cause your dog to ask these three question: “What”, “Why”, and “For How Long”. Your job is to answer your dog’s questions fairly and consistently.

Here are the steps:

1. You must know yourself what, why and for how long the boundary is! You cannot be clear and consistent in your teaching if you yourself don’t know the lesson.
2. Put the leash on your dog and encourage him to follow you to inside the boundary.
3. Briefly place your hand on your dog’s brisket (chest) to signal the lesson has begun.
4. Keep the leash at a length that prevents your dog from making a mistake and crossing the boundary, but at the same time the leash must be loose...this is a lesson for your dog, not the leash. The leash should be parallel with the floor, **not** straight up from your dog to you. Be prepared to answer your dog’s questions: “what if I try to put only my right paw across the boundary?”, “left paw?”, “toenail?”. Boundaries are black and white, be consistent because if you allow one paw over the boundary then your answer to the question “what?” is unclear, and you can be sure that the rest of your dog will also cross the boundary.
5. **Praise your dog for not crossing the boundary.** I repeat, praise your dog for not crossing the boundary. Praise every time the leash is loose. If your dog strains against the leash, you are preventing forward movement and you do not need to give a verbal reprimand, the leash is teaching the lesson. But in order to teach the “what” of the lesson, you must praise your dog each time the leash is loose inside the boundary. The “why” of the lesson is answered every time your dog does not try to cross the boundary. The “why” is because “good things happen for me (praise) when I do not cross the boundary”.
6. **Release your dog from the boundary.** Make a big deal of it: “Let’s go!” or “Free!” and be sure to bring your dog out of the boundary. This answers the question “For how long?”. The answer is “you hold the boundary until you hear the release word”. At first, you must be with your dog and make a big movement forward to get your dog to follow you over the boundary. A happy, clear voice signals the end of the boundary lesson. With practice and over time you won’t need to go into the boundary with your dog and release him from it; but for now you do need to make the release crystal clear for your dog.
7. “Proof” your dog. See if you can step out of the boundary but your dog remains in place. Return to the boundary, praise and release. Next, place a yummy treat outside of the boundary and praise every time your dog offers a loose leash. Try to reach down and get the treat. If your dog moves forward as you move forward, simply straighten yourself and leave the treat on the ground. Praise your dog for not straining forward – your dog is exhibiting self-control, one of the most valuable lessons you can teach your dog is self-control. Try to get the treat again. Your dog will eventually hold his position and not strain on the leash. Pick up the treat and deliver it to your dog **in the boundary** because the message you want to send to your dog is “**Good things happen for you in the boundary**”. Release. Increase the distance, duration and distraction separately and remember to keep your dog successful. If your dog “fails” the lesson, the lesson is too difficult so back it up to the step where your dog was successful and start over.

