



# Deaf Dogs

Whether born deaf or having lost hearing through age, illness or accident, dogs are amazingly adaptive to life without sound, and owning and training a deaf dog can be a hugely rewarding experience!

Considerate communication will give your deaf dog the right kind of support to help them understand the world around them!

## Safety first!

Unless your dog reliably returns to you when off-lead, and you are very confident that they will watch you at all times, keeping them on long lead instead of letting them off in public areas will minimise risks of them getting into difficulty, lost or confused.

## Living with a deaf dog

It is important to be consistent with any rules and routines you have put in place for your deaf dog so they can be confident and unlikely to become confused about their environment and interactions.

Always give deaf dogs the choice of whether to greet people, rather than encourage people to greet and pet them straight away. Allow your dog to see the person first and to approach in their own time if they choose to, and to sniff them only if they want to.

Most deaf dogs will be startled if touched when they are not expecting it, or are asleep, so you can help your dog to get used to this by gently touching them and immediately giving them a treat. Most deaf dogs soon learn that being surprised is not necessarily a bad thing! However, occasionally a dog might become aggressive when surprised, as a means of communicating that they are worried and need to be left alone in order to feel safe. If your dog reacts in this way or appears to become increasingly more startled when being handled, you should stop and contact a qualified behaviourist to support you in reducing your dog's anxiety.

Touch should always be positive for any dog so try not to interact with your deaf dog when you are feeling frustrated or angry about anything, as they might sense this feeling from you and become worried or confused as they can't understand why you are feeling this way.

Deaf dogs might worry about where you are if you have left the room without them seeing, so you may need move past your dog on your way out, so they can watch where you go.

Getting a deaf dog's attention when they aren't looking at you can be a challenge! You could try gently touching them, turning a light on and off, waving across their line of vision, using a torch or a penlight shone near to them (but not on their face!), or simply waiting for them to turn around!

## Training a deaf dog

You will need plenty of patience and time for training, as well as plenty of imagination because hand-signals and facial expressions are the key to communicating with a deaf dog.

It's also important to keep training 'hands-free' and instead use a treat, toy or something your dog wants lure your dog into doing you would like them to.

For example, to teach your dog to sit you can show them a tasty treat, then slowly lift it over their head so that they will tilt their head backwards. Their bottom should pivot downwards at the same time, and as soon as their bottom touches the floor you can give them the treat to reward them for sitting! Once they learn to follow your hand guiding them into this position you can start to practice without a treat, so they follow your empty hand simply signalling them to sit – then produce a treat from your pocket or a treat pot to give them when they sit! Now you have a hand signal that tells them you would like them to sit, and that this will be rewarded!

Teaching deaf dogs to respond to clear visual signals will help to make their lives easier, so whatever you are teaching your dog to do, make sure you always use the same stance and arm or hand movements so your communication is consistent – sign language for dogs! Make sure everyone involved in teaching your dog knows to give the same signals!

One of the most important signs to teach is 'good dog!' and owners of deaf dogs often use a thumbs-up! This is easily taught by showing the dog a 'thumbs-up' and then tossing them a treat. This needs to be repeated until the dog looks expectantly for a treat whenever the sign is shown – this shows that they know what it means and the 'good dog' sign can now be used for training! You can use it to tell them they've done something you're happy with and that as a result of his action they are about to get a treat! This means that they're more likely to do the same again in future!

## Top Training Tip

**It may feel strange speaking to a deaf dog but using positive facial expressions such as speaking and smiling, will help them understand!**

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