



"The Stairs" Exercise

When we talk about leadership, we often make reference to a totem pole. Imagine that every person and every dog in your home has a position on the totem pole. Our goal, of course, is to make sure that all of the people are higher on the totem pole than all of the dogs! What would be your answer to this question: "If I could ask your dog what the hierarchy is around here, what would he say?" You sometimes think you are higher on the totem pole than your dog thinks you are!

The purpose of this exercise is to claim your personal space, or "bubble." In doing so, you are controlling your dog's movement and actions, which in turn **gives you more power** and can easily and effortlessly allow your dog to perceive you as higher on the totem pole. It is your dog's job to be aware of your personal space at all times, without you needing to remind him/her. By requiring respect of your space, you will increase your standing on the totem pole, and you will see and feel changes in your relationship on a grand scale.

Do not underestimate the value of this exercise. We have had clients report back dramatic, positive shifts in their relationship with their dog when implementing just this exercise. This exercise alone has solved significant dog behavior problems including leash pulling, jumping on people, uncontrollable barking and aggression towards strangers.

This is one of the most valuable pieces of information you will receive from Paws and Possibilities, a gold nugget you can use with all dogs you interact with, forever.

How to Successfully Claim your Personal Space:

You do not need any tools to complete this exercise. You do not need a clicker or treats and you do not need any official form of punishment. You may, for extreme cases, need your dog on a leash, but most of you will be able to accomplish this exercise with just you and your dog.

Avoid talking or giving your dog a command, such as "wait" or "stay." We want your dog to wait for you to go first as a default behavior. If you train your dog to "stay" because you told him to, there is an unwritten implication he does not need to stay if you do not say, "stay." Did you get that? This is critical and may apply to other areas of your training, too. Soak up the importance of this statement: If you tell your dog to "stay" during this exercise or other times you work your dog, there is an underlying implication he does not need to stay any time you do not tell him to stay. We want the opposite affect. We want your dog to stay all the time, unless you tell him NOT to. If you wanted



to give your dog a command, it would be to tell him to go ahead of you. Does that make sense?

The nuts and bolts:

1. Start by standing at the entrance to a narrow space (the bottom/top of a flight of stairs, the end of a hallway, a doorway, etc) with your dog behind you. Your bubble now occupies the width of the narrow space. Your dog is not allowed into your bubble without your permission, ever. Because of that, your dog may not pass you as you move through the narrow space.
2. Begin moving through the space. If your dog tries to pass you, block him/her with your leg by moving your leg over towards the wall, keeping your dog from slipping past you. The force necessary to block your dog needs to be a match to the intensity your dog's drive is to pass you. If s/he is slowly walking by you, you can block calmly and get your point across to your dog. If your dog is desperately trying to bolt past you, your blocking will need to be fast and effective. Ideally, your dog will not get past you! The beginning implementation phase of this exercise is not always pretty. I often get the sense that whoever wants it more will win- your dog's drive to be in front or your convictions to getting all of the benefits of this exercise. Who wants it more? You, I hope!
3. Once your dog is behind you and not trying to squeeze past you, move your leg back. Does your dog try to pass you again? If so, repeat the blocking motion until your dog is no longer attempting to pass. Even though you are not saying anything, each time you unblock, it is as if you are saying, "Are you going to try to pass me again?" You need to be sure the answer is a clear NO before you move on.
4. If your dog is trying to move through your bubble before you have taken a step, do not move. Work on claiming one spot before advancing further.

Look for a change in your dog's state of mind. Has your dog submitted or are they looking for their next opportunity to pass you? You should feel the change in your dog's energy when he gives up trying to pass you. When you feel it, you may continue forward.

Tips for success:

- *Do not rush this exercise.* It is critical that you unblock and pause for a moment before continuing to move and **many people forget this part**. Remember, the goal is for the dog to respect your bubble, not to stay behind you simply because your leg is in their way! **If you do not unblock and pause (remember you are checking to see if your dog is going to try to pass you again), you will be wasting your time with this exercise.** The magic happens in the pause, with your leg unblocked from the dog, and the dog choosing not to pass you, even though there is space to get by.



- Eventually, you should not need to block your dog. If you slow down or stop moving, the dog should stop automatically as if **your bubble is a force-field**. Your dog is now showing respect for you by avoiding your space. This, by the way, is similar to how a dog would treat a more dominant dog in a pack.
- You can trump this default behavior with a command, if you wish. For example, if you open the back door to let your dog outside but your bubble is in their way, you can train a command that allows your dog the ability to move through your space.
- **The hardest part about this activity is remembering to do it!** If you make a conscious effort of working this every time you are in a narrow space with your dog, your will not need to set aside time to practice.
- Doing this “stairs” exercise on the stairs is dangerous! Please hold the railing and be careful.
- When working your dog with this exercise, the intention is that s/he not pass your bubble. It does not matter if your dog arrives at the final destination before you as long as he did not pass you bubble. For example, if you have an island in the kitchen and your dog goes clockwise around the island when you start to go counter-clockwise so that s/he can get to the back door first, that is fine. The point of this exercise is that your dog not squeeze past you in a narrow space to be the first one there!
- Many dogs will find this exercise significantly more difficult in one direction on the stairs than the other. For example, your dog might be perfectly happy to be behind you as you go up the stairs, but may consider it one of the hardest things you have ever asked for having him/her stay behind you going down the stairs. Some dogs choose to wait at the top of the stairs until you have completely descended the stairs and then run down them like they always have. That, too, is not an issue. The intention here is that your dog simply not pass you.
- There is a good video on You Tube that demonstrates this concept. Look for [“freerunning sled dogs”](#) and watch the video at minute 2:06 to see this concept in action. You will notice the handler will stop and all of the dogs will stop, too.

Paws and Possibilities is for people who want to be proud of their dog, not embarrassed by him. Using their unique training system, you will create the relationship with your dog you've always dreamed about all while feeling like it's a walk in the park. Meet Kim, Lauren, and Sarah and get ready to train your dog, one paw at a time, at www.PawsandPossibilities.com or call 1-855-558-PAWS (7297).