

## **Commodore – Labradoodle**

### **Background**

Commodore is a 5 month old labradoodle from a good breeder. He is well socialised, has attended puppy classes and has good basic training. Currently he is presenting challenging behaviour with mouthing and over excitedness mainly due to adolescence.

### **Basic Training**

As Commodore is going through adolescence it is a good idea to go back to basics with training and reinforce the basic commands. He is possibly going to go through a stage where he decides to blow off commands (including recall) so drilling them on a day to day basis is a good idea to make sure they come out the other side intact!

### **Mouthing**

Commodore's mouthing seems to be mostly in frustration so traditional methods of yelping or substituting with a toy are not working. There are several strategies for this – the short term one is to avoid the situation that causes the frustration nip in the first place by hand targeting. Using a hand target you can ask Commodore to move places without having to physically touch him or take his toy away and setting yourself up for a frustrated reaction.

Re teach the on and off command for the sofa and reinforce those so it becomes automatic for him. As he is at the stage of pushing boundaries even though he knows those commands he may choose to ignore them at the moment so re-teaching them is necessary. Work on drop and swap as well – as well as setting up training opportunities by strategically placing things for him to pick and then asking him to drop or swap them. Remember to sometimes give the object or toy back to him so it isn't too frustrating.

### **Impulse Control Exercises**

Commodore would really benefit from impulse control to help him deal with frustration so I've outlined a few games below that you can do with him:

#### Jazz Up and Settle Down

An training exercise from Ian Dunbar this is really useful in teaching dogs how to bring themselves down from an exciting experience.

Start with your dog in a down or settle position and on leash (just in case). Have your dog's favourite toy and some treats.

Reward your dog regularly as he holds position and for being still and calm.

Suddenly, say his release word such as "free dog" and throw his toy, or run for him to chase you or anything else that's likely to get him excited.

After no more than 5 seconds of crazy suddenly cue him onto his mat and/or into a settle position.

Have him settle for at least 10 seconds or as long as it takes to get him nice and calm. In the beginning this may take longer but you will see an improvement as you continue to practice.

Wait for him to calm and then release him and encourage more crazy. Repeat often. As he gets better you can get fussier – you will want him to settle quicker.

As your dog progresses you can have slightly longer crazy times but settle time should always be twice as long e.g. 10 seconds of crazy & at least 20 seconds of calm.

Calm time starts when the dog has settled, and not all the time it takes to get him there.

With this exercise you are teaching your dog to come up quickly and come down quickly - crazy dogs usually don't have a problem with the first part but are often unable for the second part, coming down.

Practice out on walks, between throws of the ball, between tug games, before bed time, before guests arrive, whatever you can think of.

### **Impulse Control 101 – Leave It**

'*Leave it*' is the foundation impulse control exercise and can then be made more and more challenging to reflect real life situations in which we might need our dogs to '*leave it*'.

### **One Hand or Two?**

To start with the '*leave it*' exercise we play the one-handed game or the two-handed game.

If you have a gentle, slower moving, more laid back dog you can play one handed. But if your dog is pretty enthusiastic, lively and large you might be best with the two handed approach.

#### **One hand:**

- take some really yummy treats cut up into teeny tiny pieces
- put about ten in your hand
- show them to your dog
- if he moves toward your hand immediately close your fist
- don't let him get those treats no matter what he tries
- if he looks away from your closed fist, even a glance, open your hand
- as soon as comes for the treats again, close your hand
- he will soon stop trying to get the treats in your fist
- if he stays off long enough open your hand and feed him a treat with your other hand; before handing him each treat say 'take it'
- feed him while he stays off your hand
- if he moves toward your hand again, close your fist

Repeat until all the treats are gone and have another session later on.

#### **Two-hands:**

- take some really yummy treats cut up into teeny tiny pieces
- put about ten in one hand and a couple in the other hand
- put the full hand behind your back – this is the hand that you will feed from
- show the dog the couple of treats in your other hand
- if he moves toward your hand, close your fist; if he is particularly enthusiastic withdraw your hand out of his reach – if required, have him on leash with the leash under your foot so he can't jump on you
- if he stays off the treat, if only for a beat, feed him a treat from the hand behind your back saying 'take it'
- repeat and you will soon find that not only does your dog stay off the open hand but also watches for the arrival of your other hand from behind your back

#### **Adding a cue:**

While first practicing these exercises do not speak to your dog at all and certainly don't cue them. This is an impulse control exercise so we want the dog to learn to calm his behaviour himself without being asked or intimidated.

Once you can introduce your treat-containing-hand without your dog diving on it, you can begin to name the behaviour.

Say '*leave it*' after revealing your treat laden hand.

### **Up the challenge:**

Once you have put the behaviour on cue get a little bit fussier and up your criteria – instead of just leaving the treat for a beat make sure that your dog also gives you eye contact while he waits. You are teaching the dog that calm and attentiveness gets him yummys.

Now that you have begun to add a cue word you can begin to gradually build time.

Start by just having your dog 'leave it' for 1 second, then 3 seconds, then 5 seconds and so on.

## **LEAVE IT & THE ART OF DOGGIE ZEN**

Now that your dog is able to leave a treat right in front of him in your hand for several seconds to cue we can take the next step.

This exercise is also great for proofing stays in sit or down positions too so is win-win.

To start with you don't need to have your dog in a sit or a down just work on getting started.

Prepare as you have before with about 10 teeny tiny treats.

- place one treat on the floor so your dog can see it
- have the other treats in your hand behind your back
- if he approaches the one on the floor cover it with your hand
- if he moves away lift your hand but cover it if he approaches again
- if he stays off it long enough, pick up the treat and hide it; say 'take it' and offer one from your other hand to the dog

If your dog has real trouble with this one you can work a little more gradually by continuing with leave it 101 and hold your hand with treat close to the floor. Work gradually so that you can eventually get the treat on the floor.

Once your dog is leaving the treat on the floor add the 'leave it' cue after you place the treat on the floor.

Remember, you are not adding a cue or saying anything until you have with this exercise.

### **Up the challenge:**

Once you get this exercise on cue, you can begin to build time and proximity.

Start by moving the treats gradually closer to the dog and have him leave it for just a beat.

When building time, move the treat a little further away and as he gets better you can move it closer. Each time you move it closer go back to 1 second and build again.

## **Settling**

For this choose a mat or a bed to be the place where he goes when he needs some down time. Sit with him, on the floor and wait for him to relax (rolled over onto one hip, blinking and breathing slowing down and relaxed, floppy mouth). Then give him a treat and some long, slow strokes – the key is to reward him without making him excited. Feed him on the mat, give him a kong on the mat and most importantly reward him when he relaxes on it of his own accord. Practice settling on the mat several times a day so he can learn to be chilled out in the house and not need constant stimulation.

## **Jumping on people on the sofa**

For this you will need both of you and for Commodore to be wearing a lead. Have one of you lie down on the sofa and when he goes to jump use the lead to remove him from the sofa. Don't speak to him or make eye contact – he's jumping to get attention and he doesn't care if it is bad or good so we are removing that attention from him.

Keep interrupting the behaviour before he can do it and then swap roles. If you can also recruit a friend or two so you can practice with them all the better.

Once he has been removed and ignored a few times he will hopefully start offering another behaviour – maybe a sit or a down (don't ask for it wait until he offers it). When he does that then give him some calm attention – the aim is to keep him calm throughout this so make sure you speak in low voices and slow movements. Don't introduce toys or food treats because we don't want him getting excited.