

The Pushing Exercise

One of the reasons for doing the pushing exercise is to create a better emotional bond between you and your dog. But it's also amazingly effective at solving all kinds of behavioral problems.

On the most basic level, all behavior is an expression of energy. But energy has a need to flow toward something. And sometimes a dog's emotional energy gets blocked by past experiences, fears, lack of confidence, etc. The pushing exercise can help a dog learn how to push past her internal resistance, her emotional barriers, and whatever other kinds of energy blocks she might be experiencing. Once she does, she'll be happier, more confident, plus a lot more obedient.

All dogs are good dogs, some just need a little push! NOTE: This version of the exercise is designed to be used by the average dog owner, one whose dog has mild to moderate behavioral problems. *Do not try this with a dog who's aggressive toward humans over food.* You have to either do some preliminary work with such dogs before moving on to the pushing exercise, or leave it in the hands of an experienced professional.

The Pushing Exercise (please print this page so you'll have a hard copy)

At meal time, take the dog outdoors on-lead to a quiet spot with few distractions. Have the dog's morning or evening meal with you in a bait bag (or you can use a nail bag from the hardware store). It's a good idea to feed the dog only half her usual fare at her previous meal so that she'll come into this exercise with a bit more hunger than usual.

When you find a good spot, stop walking, calmly stroke her and praise her. Scruff her under the chin or scratch under her ears. Set up a warm, convivial feeling.

Take an open, loose, non-threatening stance, not directly head-on, but at a kind of 3/4 degree angle, with your legs apart so when she comes to take the food from your hand she'll be coming at a more direct angle. You don't want her coming in from either your right or left side—she should come straight between your legs.

With some dogs I do the exercise while seated, but try to keep the same loose body language.

Bend your knees slightly, but lean back from the hips in what I call the "Kramer." But keep your shoulders rounded, not stiff. This is the kind of stance that will automatically encourage your dog to want to come toward you. (She might not at first, but she'll at least have some desire to do so, much more so than if you stand close and loom over her).

Grab a handful of food from the bag. I like to use my non-dominant (left) hand for the food (I'm right handed). Also, if the dog eats kibble I usually marinate it in hot water for 20 mins. or so, until it's nice and mushy; I also like to add some juicy chicken or bits of steak, or some tasty canned food as well. Sometimes a dog I'm working with will be eating a raw food diet. That's fine too. I always wear a latex glove on my food hand.

Show the dog that you have a nice handful of yummy food. Praise her for showing interest in it. Then close your fingers gently across your palm (covering the food), and say, in a warm, gentle tone of voice, "Wait..." And as you can see the dog holding her energy back for a second or so, say, "Good... Ready!" in a happy tone, then open your hand and let her eat.

As she eats, put your other hand lightly against her chest, with your palm up, cupping her breast bone. Don't push against her with this hand. Just let it sit there. If she shows nervousness about having that other hand against her chest while she's eating, you have to take it a little slower; use that hand to scratch under her ears again, etc. You want her to feel comfortable. Let her eat while you pet her and scratch her with that

hand.

Once she's finished eating that handful of food, withdraw your other hand from her chest, dip into the bag for another handful, and start again, repeating the same sequence of words: "Wait..." She waits. "Ready? Okay!"

If she really gets into eating this way, or is almost there, but not quite, I'll encourage her while she's eating. "Oh, you want it! Come on! Come on and eat it! Push me! Push me!" You have to make sure this doesn't throw her off though. It should make her want to push into harder. If her interest lags instead, ease off a little.

Over the course of a few days, as you sense her increased openness toward eating this way, you can start pulling the food hand away bit by bit, while keeping the other hand in position, nice and steady against her chest. If she's interested enough in the food, this will automatically cause her to push into you to keep eating. As she gets used to the feeling of pressure, and seems to start to like it, you can slowly build the amount of pressure she's able to tolerate against her chest. The harder the dog pushes the more of her fear and confidence issues she'll be getting rid of (pushing past her emotional barriers).

The ultimate goal is that eventually, over the course of a week or two (maybe more, depending on the dog), you'll have her pushing so hard that she's up on her back legs, nearly knocking you over. But never let her feel pressure against her chest unless she's also eating at the same time. As she begins to push harder and harder at each meal you'll see some incredible changes take place in the dog's behavior. She'll become calmer, more obedient, less pushy (I know!), and more centered and balanced.

That's what always happens. You just have to see it to believe it...

To purchase Neil Sattin's DVD, which will give you a clearer picture on how to do this, [click here](#).

[What Kinds of Behavioral Problems is the Pushing Exercise Good For?](#)

[Why it works](#) (from the creator of the exercise, Kevin Behan)