



PawHonest

DOG TRAINING

FREE 7-DAY PLAN

The 7-Day Calm Dog Plan

Seven short brain games, one a day, fifteen minutes each.
No equipment to buy, nothing to punish, and a routine you
can actually keep at the end of it.

Megan Hartley — canine behaviour writer and rescue foster

Force-free and reward-based, in line with AVSAB guidance · pawhonest.com

How to use this plan

A dog who won't settle is usually not under-exercised. They're under-occupied. Walking a restless dog for another hour tends to build a fitter restless dog; asking them to *think* for fifteen minutes tends to produce a dog who sleeps.

That's the whole idea behind these seven days. Each one is a short game that makes your dog work something out. They stack: day one buys you attention, and everything after it spends that attention on something useful.

Five rules that make this work

- ✓ **Fifteen minutes, split up.** Two or three short rounds beat one long session. Stop while your dog still wants more.
- ✓ **Use their food.** Measure the day's kibble into a pot and use it as the reward. No extra calories, no bribery problem.
- ✓ **Quiet room first.** Everything is easier without a window, a doorbell or another dog in it. Add difficulty later, one thing at a time.
- ✓ **Mark the moment.** Say "yes" the instant your dog gets it right, then hand over the food. The word is what tells them *which* thing earned it.
- ✓ **Never correct a wrong guess.** If your dog gets it wrong, they simply don't get paid. That's it. Telling them off teaches them that offering behaviour is risky, which is the opposite of what you want.

Before day one — one honest check

If your dog's restlessness or inability to settle came on **suddenly**, or comes with pain, limping, panting at rest, appetite changes or any aggression, stop here and see a vet first. Discomfort and several medical conditions look exactly like a behaviour problem, and no game fixes them. I'm not a veterinarian, and this plan is not a substitute for one.

Seven days, one game a day

DAY 01 • 1 OF 7 The Name Game

Why this is first: every other exercise in this plan needs your dog to look at you before it can start. Most "he ignores me" problems are really "his name stopped meaning anything", because it's been said forty times a day with nothing attached to it.

- 1 Stand in a quiet room with your dog's food in your hand and say their name **once**, in a normal voice.
- 2 The moment their eyes meet yours, say "yes" and hand over a piece of food.
- 3 If they don't look, wait. Don't repeat the name. Make a small noise instead, then mark and pay the look.
- 4 Ten repetitions, then stop. Three rounds across the day.

TIME	YOU NEED	DONE WHEN
3 × 5 minutes	Their own food	They turn within a second, in a quiet room

The usual mistake: saying the name two or three times when nothing happens. That teaches your dog the name is background noise and the third one is the real one. One name, then wait.

DAY 02 · 2 OF 7 Find It

Why it tires them: scent work is demanding in a way that running isn't. A dog using their nose is concentrating hard, and concentration is what produces the flop-on-the-floor sleep you're after.

- 1 Take a handful of your dog's food and let them see you scatter it — in grass, or across a towel on the floor.
- 2 Say "find it" and let them get on with it.
- 3 When that's easy, scatter it while they're in another room so they arrive to a cold search.
- 4 Two rounds of five minutes is plenty.

TIME	YOU NEED	DONE WHEN
2 × 5 minutes	A towel or a patch of grass	They search calmly instead of frantically

The usual mistake: helping. Pointing at the last three pieces feels kind, but the searching *is* the exercise. Let them work it out, even slowly.

DAY 03 · 3 OF 7 The Towel Roll

What it builds: persistence. A dog who has learned that fiddling with something eventually pays off is a dog who can be left with a puzzle instead of your skirting boards.

- 1 Lay a towel flat and sprinkle food along it.
- 2 Fold it loosely in half — loose enough that your dog gets a win in the first few seconds.
- 3 Once they're unfolding it easily, roll it up instead. Then roll it and tuck the end under.
- 4 Stay in the room and say nothing. Let them think.

TIME	YOU NEED	DONE WHEN
10 minutes	An old towel	They work at it without giving up or shredding it

The usual mistake: making it hard on the first attempt. A dog who fails at the start quits — and quitting is the habit you least want to teach. Start almost insultingly easy.

DAY 04 · 4 OF 7 Sit and Wait

Why it matters: this is the first exercise where your dog practises *not* doing something. That's the muscle behind not bolting out of a door and not mugging a visitor, and it's built in seconds, not minutes.

- 1 Ask for a sit. Count one second. Say "yes" and pay.
- 2 Add a second at a time: two, three, five. If they break, you went too fast — drop back and build again.
- 3 When ten seconds is comfortable, put their food bowl down and ask for the same wait before releasing them to it.
- 4 Use a clear release word — "okay" — so the wait has a definite end.

TIME	YOU NEED	DONE WHEN
3 × 5 minutes	Nothing	They hold ten seconds and wait for the release word

The usual mistake: adding time and distance at once — stepping backwards *and* counting to ten. Change one thing at a time or your dog can't tell which part they got wrong.

DAY 05 · 5 OF 7 The Muffin Tin

What it adds: sustained problem-solving. Days 2 and 3 were quick wins; this one asks your dog to keep going for several minutes, which is where the real tiredness comes from.

- 1 Drop food into the cups of a muffin tin — not all of them, so some are empty.
- 2 Cover every cup with a tennis ball or a rolled sock.
- 3 Let your dog work out how to move the balls. Stay nearby and quiet.
- 4 Once easy, use only three baited cups out of twelve so they have to search properly.

TIME

10 minutes

YOU NEED

Muffin tin + balls or socks

DONE WHEN

They clear it methodically rather than by flipping it

The usual mistake: leaving them alone with it the first time. Some dogs chew tennis balls, and a swallowed one is an emergency. Supervise until you know your dog.

DAY 06 • 6 OF 7 The Settle Mat

This is the one that changes evenings. Every other day teaches your dog to do something. This one teaches them that *switching off* is a thing worth doing — and it's the piece most owners never train at all.

- 1 Put a mat or a folded blanket on the floor in the room where you actually sit.
- 2 Say nothing. Ask for nothing. Just wait.
- 3 Any time your dog touches it, calmly drop a piece of food onto the mat. Any time they lie down on it, drop two.
- 4 Build up to sitting down with a book while they hold it. Pay them occasionally for staying settled.

TIME

15 minutes, relaxed

YOU NEED

A mat or blanket

DONE WHEN

They go to it on their own and lie down

The usual mistake: using the mat as a "go away" spot when they're being annoying. The moment the mat means banishment, it stops working. It only ever means good things happen quietly here.

DAY 07 · 7 OF 7 Putting it together

Why the order matters: nose first to take the edge off, brain second while they're focused, mat last so the session *ends* in calm. Finishing on a settle is what teaches your dog how the evening is supposed to go.

5 min · Nose

Scatter feed or a quick "find it". Takes the fizz off.

5 min · Brain

Towel roll or muffin tin.
The thinking work.

5 min · Settle

Mat, quietly, until they lie down and stay.

TIME

15 minutes, once a day

BEST MOMENT

Late afternoon, before the evening slump

DONE WHEN

Your dog settles without being asked

What to expect, honestly

Most owners see a difference in the first week — not a different dog, but a dog who lies down sooner and gets up less. What takes longer is the habit: three or four weeks before settling becomes the default rather than something you engineer.

If nothing has shifted after two weeks of doing this daily, the usual causes are that the sessions are too long, the reward isn't worth working for, or the room has too much going on. In that order.

When it isn't a training problem

A dog who paces, can't lie down, pants at rest, or gets worse rather than better with mental work may be in pain or dealing with a medical issue — and genuine separation anxiety is a specific condition that needs a proper plan, not enrichment. If that sounds like your dog, see a veterinarian, and ask about a referral to a qualified behaviourist. There's no prize for handling that alone.

When seven days **isn't** enough

This plan is deliberately small. Seven games, one skill each, enough to prove to yourself that fifteen minutes of thinking does more than another lap of the park.

What it doesn't give you is a *curriculum* — a sequence that keeps building for months, with harder puzzles as your dog gets better at solving them. If day seven left you wanting the next fifty, that's the gap to fill.

The programme I point people to

Brain Training for Dogs is a structured, force-free course built around exactly this idea: obedience taught through games, in escalating difficulty. I've reviewed it honestly — including who it's wrong for, because it isn't right for everyone.

Read the honest review → pawhonest.com/brain-training-for-dogs-review

That review contains an affiliate link: if you buy through it I earn a commission at no extra cost to you, and it never changed a word of what I wrote. Full details at pawhonest.com/affiliate-disclosure

More free guides on the same idea

- ✓ **Mental Stimulation for Dogs: 12 Games That Actually Tire Them Out** — the longer list this plan was drawn from.
- ✓ **Why Does My Dog Ignore Me? 7 Real Reasons** — if day one was the hard one for you, start here.
- ✓ **How to Train Your Dog at Home (Without a Trainer)** — the full method, in order.

All at pawhonest.com/blog

Sources

1. **American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB)**. Position statement on humane dog training — recommends reward-based methods and advises against training that relies on fear, pain or intimidation. Accessed August 2026.
2. **Coren, S.** Research on canine word learning, widely cited for the finding that the average dog can learn on the order of 165 words. Accessed August 2026.

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Written by Megan Hartley, canine behaviour writer and rescue foster of 30+ dogs. **Megan is not a veterinarian.** This plan is general educational information and is not a diagnosis, a prescription, or a substitute for professional veterinary or behavioural advice.

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