

{Blog post}

## The deaf dog - your extra patience required

The inability to hear is a challenge not just for humans, but for the dogs who love them. You may notice that over time your dog may lose his or her hearing. Of course, there are breeds prone to genetic deafness, including the Dalmatian. Dogs can lose hearing as a result of ear infection, or accidents, or a host of other causes.

When adopting a puppy, you should take a few moments to test that she can hear. If a hearing-impaired pup sees her brothers and sisters rush meet a newcomer, she may tag along just from that visual cue. It's important during adoption to isolate a puppy. In a separate room, make an appropriate sound when she's looking away or distracted. Prove to the best of your ability that the animal can hear before adding her to your family.

Or adopt her anyway, in spite of the fact that she cannot hear. Many wonderful people do so every year, understanding that their new relationship will require some special communication efforts.

### **Those adoring eyes**

Frequently, the dog makes up for its lack of hearing by focusing more on you as the pet parent. In other words, she may watch you every step. Some new pet parents can be unnerved by this constant attention. Others come to welcome their dog's steady gaze. Dogs learn to watch the face, and especially the eyes of the person they respect.

With time, patience and training, the dog can easily learn to recognize hand signals. Begin with some fun play for a few moments. Then show your dog the hand signal for "good", followed with a tasty treat and some physical pats and affection. Many use the popular "thumbs up," as a universal sign for good. Show the signal again, and repeat the process. Continue for a few minutes or until your dog shows signs of tiring or disinterest.

Pick up the same exercise later in the day, or the next day. In time, add signals for "no," which could involve shaking your head and cutting off the eye contact. Move on to the big 3: "sit," "stay", and "come." Remember: physical praise, patience, and repetition.

### **Training tools**

For better communication at a distance, or when a dog is distracted, consider a remote training collar. At the press of a button, you deliver a low-level "tingle" which gets her attention. With your repetitive training, she'll learn to associate the low-level static stimulation with looking up and finding you. Collars are available with a range of light touch levels. You can even use a vibration collar that will act as a pet pager!

Some trainers have had good luck with handheld laser pointers. Take care: you could harm a dog's vision by aiming directly into her eyes. But for some pets in certain situations, a brilliant spot in front of her can attract needed attention.

Whether you are considering adopting a deaf dog, or your dog loses hearing over time, be assured that there are people like you that have met this challenge. Talk with your veterinarians' office. Also check the internet for resources that can put you in touch with people that can help. The Deaf Dog Education Action Fund has an informative website: [www.deafdogs.org](http://www.deafdogs.org)

A surprising bonus: You may find that your hearing-impaired dog learns faster than other dogs you've had. Because the learning dog has fewer audible distractions, they may stay focused and more attentive to you, their training partner. Quicker learning means you'll have more time for play, for affection, and for love.

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