Crazy Dog to Calm Dog … Meditating with Pets

In the crazy frantic pace of everyday Eastern Suburbs life where everyone and everything is a bit noisy and fast, have ever stopped to wonder why our dogs bark, our kids scream and sometimes the world just seems so fast and exhausting??

Our brains are just doing our best to keep up with everything that is going on around us, taking in all the stimuli, the noises, the smells, the sights. When a puppy moves in with its new family, there is so much excitement. It's not surprising that they absorb that energy and get excited too! But as with everyone else, quiet time can be beneficial in allowing us to cope with change and just rest our bodies and brains.

When we teach our pets to "sit", we are matching up the action of putting your bottom on the ground with the word to sit. As pets can't speak English, the word "sit" originally means nothing to them. However, if we keep repeating the word as they do the action of sitting, followed by a quick "yes" and a reward (food or pat) they eventually learn that the action that matches the word gets the reward.

In the same way, we can also teach up pets to be calm. The best time to do this is when they are already relaxed.

1. Set up a "meditative or calm space". This may be a bed or a favourite rug or cushion.
2. Take your dog for a walk or have a chase the toy game with your cat
3. Spray the bed with Adaptil or Feliway spray – these are species specific calming pheromones. The spray contains an alcohol carrier and should be sprayed 10 minutes before you use the bed.
4. Ask your pet to lay down on the bed (after a run/ play) they should feel ready for a lie down. When they are lying – use long slow gentle strokes from head to toe. Use the word "c-a-l-m" in a slow drawnout voice. Keep it quiet and low energy. Your pet is associating this action of lying calmly with the word calm.

5. By practicing this process daily, the word calm will be cementing its way into your pet's vocabulary. Just like meditation in people, it can be challenging when starting out, but with practice it becomes easier and easier.
6. Not only is this relaxing for your pet, but it can be very calming and bonding for us as well.
7. Once the concept is cemented in your pet's brain, we can gradually use it to calm them down when over excited. Remember though, to increase the degree of excitement incrementally (little by little) and practice calm in that situation before moving up to more difficult or stressful situations eg initial training should be in a darkened quiet area, once achieved, increase the environmental stimulus slowly, maybe have the radio or TV on, achieve calm in this environment then try making it harder with TV on and other people sitting in the room. Each step should be a subtle increase – making sure that calm can be achieved at that level before moving on to more difficult, stimulating circumstances.
8. Eventually we can achieve, calm in the house and fun and games when outside playing in the park. Without teaching our pet's that these are the preferred rules, how can we expect them to "just behave".

Please be patient with new pets and if you feel that your training is going nowhere or that your pet is just has ADD and is uncontrollable, please contact us at Vet HQ and a behaviour consultation or referral to a trainer may be needed.