



Training Between the Ears Behavioral Down (BD)

Behavioral Down (BD) vs. Stand on the dog (SOTD):

Stand on the dog is a general concept with no specific criteria

Behavioral Down is a specific concept with specific criteria that are based

Behavioral Down –Criteria

- * There is NEVER downward pressure on the leash.
- * The length of the leash from the handler's foot should be the shortest length possible that should allow for slack in the leash if the dog stands immediately beside the handler's leg but no more slack than that.
- * Handler must completely ignore dog's behavior through the entire process including not engaging the dog physically, visually, or verbally.
- * If the leash becomes tight while the dog is laying down, perhaps because the dog rolled on its side or laid into the leash when going down, the handler should discreetly lift their foot to release any tension in the leash. The dog must not feel leash tension while laying down.
- * Target behavior is complete relaxation which is identified by the dog not only being down but in complete contact with the ground; its muscles and breathing being in a relaxed state; and, visually disengaged from the environment.
- * When the target behavior is reached, that constitutes one Cycle.
- * The second cycle begins spontaneously when the dog becomes not relaxed anymore, most commonly by getting up and moving around but the dog could still be laying down but not as relaxed as target behavior.
- * Handler should always get two (2) complete Cycles before releasing the dog.
- * Release must be non-energetic and not involve any motion on the part of the handler.
- * Must be started when the trainer has a completely open time window since the two cycles must be completed and there's no way to predict the time needed.
- * Jack-in-the-box behavior is a normal part of the process.

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Some thoughts on use and training of the BD:

* Behavioral downs are NOT a stress free way of learning, arguably nothing is. It is actually an important part of the learning psychology of the BD that the dog goes through some stress. The purpose of the BD is to teach the dog how to calm themselves down when they are under stress (whether eustress or distress) and how to let go of unproductive energy. That said the dog should initially be taught the process at the easiest time in the easiest place for the dog. If the dog seems to just lay down and relax without any challenge then that situation is too easy, the dog is not actually learning anything relating to the purpose of the BD. Nothing bad about that and good that you started in a very easy situation, now move to a time or place that will be just slightly more challenging to the dog. As the dog shows it can reasonably easily relax in one situation/time just take another step up. Eventually the dog should be able to relax in situations such as outside on a deck, at a sidewalk cafe....whatever you're willing to put in the time and effort to help the dog learn. The dog will likely, and should be expected to, need other training in parallel to the BD to be successful in all situations. As an example, using the BD to try to overcome reactivity or aggression is not recommended. It is a great adjunct to other training.

* The first time or several times the dog does two cycles of a BD could be VERY time consuming. For a dog who has great difficulty letting go of energy and calming down it could take over an hour to do two cycles, getting target behavior twice. Do not give up, this will improve quickly AND there is a direct relationship between how long the dog takes to reach target behavior and how much they both need and will benefit from learning from this exercise.

* After the first two or three weeks it will not always be necessary to get two cycles, it's primarily important to prevent the dog from learning to act like it's relaxed (faking) to trigger a release. The dogs also learn much more deeply by doing the two cycles in the beginning than they will from doing just one.

* While doing this exercise may be quite difficult for the dog and the human in the very beginning it is absolutely life changing for both. Within a few weeks, if not days, the dog will start to spontaneously relax at times that it previously would not have and will generally be able to deal with training (of any kind) better.

* Behavioral Downs are not used to deal with transient situations such as the arrival of guests.

