



# Communicating with a Deaf Dog

## Beginning Touch

Practice touching your dog very gently on its shoulder and back. Give it treats immediately following the touch. Try to do this often throughout the day, and soon your dog will learn that having someone touch them from behind means good things are about to happen.

## Waking up

To condition your deaf dog to wake easily in response to a gentle touch, start by first placing your hand in front of the sleeping dog's nose, allowing them to smell that you are near. Next, lightly touch the dog on the shoulder or back, pretend you are trying to touch only one or two hairs with your fingertips. Then gently stroke the dog with two fingertips, then with your entire hand. Most deaf dogs will awaken during some part of this exercise. When they do open their eyes, and see their owner's smiling face, with perhaps a treat reward given to them, you will have success. In a matter of weeks, the dog becomes accustomed to waking up when the owner places a hand in front of their nose, or lightly touches their shoulder or back. Waking up becomes a gentle, positive experience.

## Getting the Attention of a Deaf Dog

Many people like to teach American Sign Language (ASL) for basic commands, but any hand signal will work. Deaf dogs are just like any other dog and can learn a great many behaviors or participate in dog sports. They can also ignore known commands just because!

If your dog is facing away from you, one of the simplest things to do is to wait until they turn around. Indoors, if you walk up behind your dog, they may feel the vibrations of your approach and turn around. If not, you can try blowing on the dog's back or head. Or you can touch them them lightly.

Different Methods include:

- Thumping or slapping the ground/surface to produce a vibration
- Flashing lights (such as a room switch) or using a flashlight
- Hand signals
- Gentle touch on a specific part of the body

A common mistake many new owners of deaf dogs make is not talking while they give their non-verbal commands. Just because the dog can't hear you doesn't mean you should remain silent; often your body language can appear unnatural if you give a command silently.

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It is *not* recommended ever, to let a deaf dog off leash, even when they are trained to “check in.” Instead, having an extremely long length of the leash (20, 40, 60+ feet) made out of BioThane, cotton or other secure material can be used to give your dog the freedom while still maintaining safety.

### **Keeping a Deaf Dog Informed Of Your Whereabouts**

As you move around your house, or when you leave, be sure to let your deaf dog know what you are doing. If a deaf dog wakes up, or turns around and finds you gone, they can become anxious. Many deaf dogs will search from room to room until they find their "missing" owner.

If a deaf dog is not looking in your direction as you leave a room, get the dog's attention, and allow them to watch you leave. They may or may not decide to join you, but at least they will know where you went.

If the dog has been sleeping while you work in a room, you can awaken them with a light touch, or by *lightly* brushing them with your foot as you leave the room.

### **Quick Tips for Living With A Deaf Dog**

- When outside, keep your deaf dog on a leash or in a fenced yard. Deaf dogs cannot hear cars and other hazards.
- Learn to communicate using hand signals. Essential signals are: sit, stay, come, down, good, no, and watch. Also establish a signal for your dog's name.
- Buy a tag for your dog's collar that says: “Sparky is deaf. If found, please call ...”
- Place a bell on your dog's collar so you can find them.
- Use a flashlight to signal to your dog that you want their attention.
- Be consistent in your communication.
- Let the dog know when you are leaving the house. Do not “disappear” when they are asleep.
- Wake a deaf dog by putting food under their nose, or by touching them away from their face. Teach children how to wake a deaf dog without startling them.

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