



# Training Between the Ears (TBTE)

## Behavioral Down (BD)

### **Purpose & Goals**

The purpose of the BD is not to get the dog to lie down. Lying down is just a by-product of the process. The goal is not even just to get the dog relaxed but to teach the dog how to let go of frustrated or hectic energy and relax ON HIS/HER OWN and to teach deep relaxation, not merely calm behavior.

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### ***Frequency***

If done properly and regularly (at least once a day is excellent but even once or twice a week will accumulate a clear and strong benefit) the Behavioral Down will make a change in the dog that will first be evident within the exercise, but which will fairly quickly (within 10-20 repetitions, typically spread over 3-50 days) be quite evident in parts of the dog's normal life.

It is universal that within this range of repetitions owners will start to notice not only that the dog becomes deeply relaxed much quicker and easier within the exercise but also will stay in that deeply relaxed state longer, will stay in it or at least a calm state through environmental stimuli that would previously have caused an energetic reaction, and that the dog will start relaxing on its own when free at times and in ways that the owner has rarely or never seen before.

### ***Calm vs. Relaxed***

Keep in mind that a dog that seems to be very calm (lying down, disengaged) in normal circumstances but jumps up the moment a human or other dog moves, a sound happens around or outside the house, etc. is not what we would consider a relaxed dog. It is merely a resting dog and all dogs rest sometimes. Difficult dogs don't rest much and are energetically roused from that rest by almost anything. They are not relaxed just because they are calm.

Our goal during the training phase is to get the dog to work through its own frustrated or hectic energy and become deeply relaxed. We want to see the dog's ability to do this increase over time



along three metrics: 1) Time to get to Target Behavior 2) Time in Target Behavior 3) Difficulty of environmental circumstances in which the dog can get to and stay at Target Behavior.

### ***Helping the Anxious Dog***

In TBTE one of our primary perspectives on helping challenging dogs is that virtually all difficult dogs have challenges with anxiety or energy. Most have what we would call a "high baseline anxiety level". This means that even when they are at their "normal" state they are not nearly as calm as most dogs and that even at their best times they are experiencing at least a low level of their emotional challenges.

Doing regular behavioral downs has consistently shown that it is a very valuable part of a program to change this high baseline anxiety level and that while the first few times of doing this can be quite stressful for some dogs the exercise predictably and progressively becomes easier for the dog. Even with most very difficult dogs that progression happens quite quickly. There is, as with most things in behavioral training, a direct correlation between how much emotional difficulty a dog has in the first, or first several, times it does this exercise and how badly it needs this work and how much it will gain from it.

It is certainly reasonable and acceptable for a trainer to do any other relaxation based work first that they feel will help the dog do better with the Behavioral Down exercise, as long as the Behavioral Down exercise itself is done in it's pure and accurate form when it is done. Things such as free shaping calmer behavior, physical exercise before doing a Behavioral Down, starting at a time that is normally a relatively quiet time energetically for the dog, etc could all be useful efforts by the trainer to help the dog more easily be successful when it begins BDs.

### ***The Role of Frustration and Raising the Challenge***

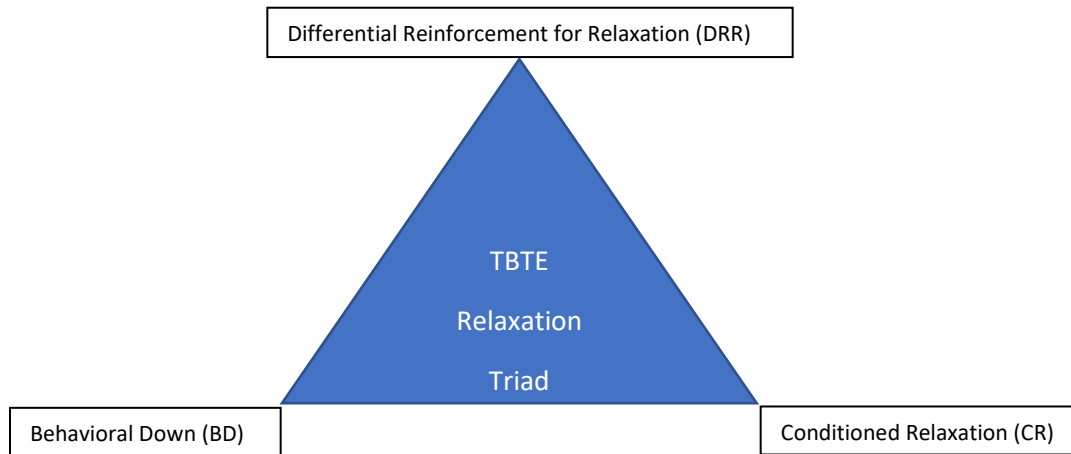
Any of these things could be worthwhile to help a very challenging dog have an easier time of its first several BDs. It is important to keep in mind though that for this exercise to benefit the dog and actually create the growth and change that it should, some level of frustration on the dog's part is critical. It is not an accomplishment, as an example, to have a dog that quickly just lies down and goes to sleep because it was given substantial physical or mental exercise just before the BD. That would actually be completely counter-productive and accomplish nothing relative

to our goals for the BD. Likewise, some dogs may have some problem with anxious energetic behavior sometimes but in some, or maybe even many, circumstances easily lie down and become quite relaxed. Just because we're standing on the leash when that happens does not make what is being done a Behavioral Down. If there is no challenge to relaxation and no frustration on the dog's part then there is no Behavioral Down. So, just as with some dogs we have to work to find the quietest, easiest time to begin doing BDs to make the process as easy as possible for them, for others we need to add some challenge so that there is actually something to grow through and learn from.

An example of the easy side would be having the dog in the living room, or even a bedroom with the door closed, at a time when no other dogs are out, the training dog has had some light or moderate exercise and the home is quiet. An example of how we might raise the beginning challenge for an easier dog would be to do the BD on the back deck, in the front yard, or in the living room at a time when family is pretty active. The key is to find a level that has some challenge but not more than is helpful...and for most challenging dogs the quietest time and place we can find will be plenty challenging.

## The TBTE Relaxation Triad

In TBTE, the Behavioral Down is one leg of The Relaxation Triad, the other two being Differential Reinforcement for Relaxation (a form of free shaping relaxation through rewards) and Conditioned Relaxation (a form of body work to induce relaxation modified from Kayce Cover's work). All three of these methods work synergistically to enhance and support each other. All three legs teach the dog not only to relax but to be very aware of its energetic/emotional state and to work on its own, and for its own reasons, to become more relaxed and more emotionally comfortable within itself and with its environment. The changes can be quite beautiful to watch and particularly to be a part of facilitating. It is life changing for the dog and its family.



## **Behavioral Down (BD) vs. Stand On The Dog/Sit On The Dog (SOTD):**

	<b>Behavioral Down</b>	<b>Stand on/Sit on the Dog</b>
<b>Time</b>	No pre-determined amount of time. Time is based on the dog's behavior.  These behaviorally based criteria are what enable us to get the same type of response from any dog, regardless of how challenged the dog may be.	Can have time-based criteria (i.e. 30 minutes).
<b>Criteria</b>	Specific behavioral criteria defined as Target Behavior below.	No specific behavioral criteria.

### **Criteria**

\* IF the rules herein are followed this should be a VERY safe exercise but it should only be done with a dog that the handler feels safe in handling with no correction. Rewards can be given to help the dog get immediately next to the handler for the start of the exercise but no rewards should be given during the exercise.

\* There is NEVER downward pressure on the leash to begin the exercise and the handler should never add any downward pressure to the leash. The leash will become tight, and therefore have some element of downward pressure, because of the dog moving around on the leash. This is unavoidable and ok.

\* The length of the leash from the handler's foot should be the shortest length possible that would allow for slack in the leash if the dog stands immediately beside the handler's leg but no more slack than that.

\* Handler and anyone in the environment must completely ignore dog's behavior through the entire process including not engaging the dog physically, visually, or verbally. No corrections (except for chewing on a leash that might break it) and no rewards.

\* If the leash becomes tight while the dog is lying down, perhaps because the dog rolled on its side or against 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 lying down. If the dog gets up

the handler should take the opportunity to shorten the leash to its original length if the dog stands near the handler. Otherwise leave the leash as is.

\* In at least the first 10 BDs, the goal is to do two cycles. The first cycle is from the time we initiate the BD by stepping on the slack leash until the dog reaches Target Behavior (described below). The dog will come out of Target Behavior on its own, often somewhat energetically but sometimes just raising its head or gently getting up. This begins the second cycle.

The second cycle will end sometime after the dog gets back to target behavior. It is important for the handler to have a sense of how long the dog was in Target Behavior the first time. Release the dog from the BD while it is in Target Behavior the second time at approximately 1/3 the time the dog stayed in Target Behavior the first time. So, if the dog was in Target Behavior the first time for 3 minutes we would release her from the BD after she was in Target Behavior in the second cycle for 1 minute. Release the dog with a non-energetic release (described below).

\* Target behavior is complete relaxation which is identified by the dog not only being down but in complete contact with the ground from its nose to its tail, its muscles and breathing being in a relaxed state and, visually disengaged from the environment. It's eyes (or ears) should not be following things in the environment.



If the dog falls asleep there is no need to worry about Target Behavior or Cycles, the exercise is done and can end at any point. It should end in a Non-Energetic Release.

\* Non-Energetic Release. The handler should release the dog from the BD as calmly as possible. The goal is not to have the dog snap out of the relaxation but to gently come out of it. Think of rousing a baby from a nap, not releasing a dog from a long down. Also, the handler must stay still with foot on the leash until AFTER the dog has done the non-energetic release.

It's possible that the dog may not become fully active and move about when released, preferring to stay at least somewhat relaxed or even very relaxed. This is fine if it happens.

\* Behavioral Downs 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. An hour or more would not be at all unusual for the dog's first few BDs and very difficult dogs may take that kind of time frame for many repetitions over the first few weeks.

\* Jack-in-the-box behavior is a normal part of the process. Jack-in-the-box behavior is when the dog experiments with lying down some but bounces right back up shortly after, never actually reaching Target Behavior during that time. Some dogs will repeat this many times in their early experience with BDs.

Steps	
	A dog who is safe being handled on-leash.
	Step on the leash.
	NO downward pressure on the leash to begin the exercise and the handler should never add any downward pressure to the leash.
	Ignore dog's behavior through the entire process including not engaging the dog physically, visually, or verbally. No corrections (except for chewing on a leash that might break it) and no rewards.
	Wait for dog to reach target behavior and complete first cycle. Handler should take note of how long dog was in target behavior in the first cycle.
	Dog will enter the second cycle on his own.
	When dog reaches target behavior after the second cycle, handler should do a non-energetic release.

## Final Thoughts on the Use and Training of the BD

► BDs 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 and in the easiest place for the dog. If the dog seems to just lie 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 in challenge. 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.

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▶ 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 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 each time you do a Behavioral Down. The two cycles are 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.

▶ BDs are not used to deal with transient situations such as the arrival of guests. They can however, when appropriate to the dog's skill level, be really great to do while guests are visiting, especially if everyone is sitting around the living room or the like. They could be really good, again, when level appropriate, to do with a dog while other dogs, kids or adults are free and even playing. The key is doing them at levels the dog is very successful at before moving on to higher level challenges.

▶ BDs should quickly become fairly easy and comfortable for the dog and the goal is that they can eventually just relax on their own at times they previously wouldn't have been able to.