

Dog Scouts of America

Boating Safety Training Instructions

Your dog must be able to swim to earn this merit badge. Be sure your dog can swim. If he can't, then try out for the puppy paddler merit badge

Your dog must be able to retrieve to earn this merit badge. If your dog does not know how to retrieve, see the "Shaping a Retrieve" section of your manual.

Encourage the dog to swim beside you, while you are still able to touch the bottom and wade through the water. You will need your arms free to prevent the dog from climbing on you. Reinforce his acceptance of the new context (swimming with the parental unit nearby). Prevent him from climbing up on you or clawing you. Reinforce when he swims on his own, near, but not on top of you. Gradually go into deeper water, reinforcing correct behavior in each new context, until you are at swimming depth for yourself.

Show your dog the retrieving dummy and get him interested. If he makes any move for it, reinforce. Let him take it in his mouth. It may feel funny--it's all knobby. Reinforce him for this context change (performing a take with a strange new object). Introduce all of the following context changes and reinforce for each acceptance. Remember, change only ONE criterion at a time--do not try to increase both the distance AND the distraction in the same training step.

- Set the dummy on the ground and have the dog pick it up
- Toss the dummy a short distance on land and have the dog fetch it
- Toss the dummy a long distance on land and have the dog fetch it
- Throw the dummy into very shallow water (ankle depth) for a retrieve
- Throw the dummy into shallow water (wading depth) for a retrieve
- Throw the dummy into deeper water (swimming depth) for a retrieve
- Throw the dummy into very shallow water (ankle depth) for a retrieve from the dock (dog can see the lake bottom & knows he is jumping onto it)
- Throw the dummy into deeper water (swimming depth) for a retrieve from the dock (dog may do a flying entry, and you want to make sure he does not crash on the bottom)
- When you think you have a decent water retrieve, increase the contexts further, by asking the dog to retrieve in the presence of outside distractions, like dogs splashing nearby, etc.

Bring a boat onto the shore, get in, sit down, and invite the dog to jump in. Make sure that nothing will obstruct him (fishing poles, life jackets, oars). Reinforce his acceptance of this new context (doing a recall into a boat). For little dogs, pull the boat along side the dock, and securely hold it there (or have one end on shore). Get in and invite the dog onto the seat of the boat. Add the following additional behaviors and context changes, ONE AT A TIME.

- Have the dog exit the boat ON CUE, in the same manner he entered the boat
- Have the dog perform a sit-stay with the boat on the shore and you in the boat (try not to let the boat tip at all)
- Have the dog perform a sit-stay with the boat on the shore with you on shore, next to the boat.
- Have the dog perform a sit-stay in the boat (on shore) with you on the shore (allow the boat to move a little bit)
- Have the dog perform a sit-stay in the boat (on shore) with you on the shore (increase contexts by adding distractions while dog is in the boat)
- Have the dog perform a sit-stay in the boat (on shore) with you on the shore (gradually start pushing the boat a little further and further, until you can launch it)
- Have dog enter a floating boat from the dock with you in the boat
- Have dog exit a floating boat to the dock with you in the boat
- Have dog enter a floating boat from the dock with you in the water
- Have dog exit a floating boat to the dock with you in the water
- Have dog enter a floating boat from the dock with you on the dock
- Have dog exit a floating boat to the dock with you on the dock

Have dog sit-stay in the floating boat while you are on the dock (increase duration)
Have dog sit-stay in the floating boat while you are on the dock (increase distance)
Have dog stay in the floating boat while you are on the dock (increase distractions)
Have dog stay in the floating boat while you are rowing the boat
Have dog stay in the floating boat while you are rowing the boat (add distractions)

Set the dog up on the beach, away from the shore and perform a short recall. Reinforce the dog's acceptance of the new context (coming when called near a beach). Perform the recall exercise with all of the following context changes, and any others you can think of:

Gradually move closer to the water
Gradually increase the distance of the recall
Have another dog present
Have another dog enter the water
Have another dog race down to the water and dive in to fetch a fun toy
Have multiple dogs present
Have multiple dogs splashing in the water
Have dog stay while you go into the water at wading depth and call him to you
Have dog stand in shallow water and do a recall to you in shallow water
Have dog stay while you go out to swimming depth (for the dog) and call
Have dog stay while you go out to swimming depth (for you) and call

Get something yucky or yummy and place it on the beach to practice your "Leave it!" exercise. You never know when there might be something on the beach that you don't want your dog getting into, like a dead fish, or some bait with the hooks still in it, or it might just be somebody's picnic lunch. You don't want him near any of it. To become a Dog Scout, or to get your Backpacking merit badge, your dog must know what "Leave it!" means. You just have to increase the contexts to include the beach environment and yucky stuff. See the section on teaching the "leave it" exercise if you haven't already mastered it