

## Training Tip Tuesday: Blind Spot Circles

This is one of my favorite exercises; and one I teach every dog I work with. It has a host of benefits, but since its Bite Prevention Week, we'll focus on those! A dog's blind spots are just off his hips; if he were a clock, they would be at 5 and 7 o'clock. Many dogs don't understand that they can just turn their heads to see into these spots; and they jump up startled when something suddenly appears there.

Have you ever watched a news report about a bite incident and seen the victim say 'I don't know what happened! I just walked by the dog and he bit!' What likely happened was the dog was less than confident, the person walked through the blind spot and suddenly appeared next to the dog. The dog got frightened and reacted.

We can help our dogs get used to movement in and out of their blind spots. We can teach them that they can just turn their head to see what's approaching, without jumping up and being scared. We can build their confidence through heightened body awareness. And we can do all this with blind spot circles! I find the exercise especially beneficial in homes with young children that tend to dart about; helping the dog learn to tolerate movement all around can stave off an incident later on!

To start, you just need to have a sit. If your dog gets bored or frustrated easily, use a leash to keep him from wandering off.

Ask your dog to sit in front of you, facing you. Take one step to the left, praise and return to center. Reward. Take one step to the right, praise and return to center. Reward. (We always reward at center.)

Your dog should be watching you move, but not getting up. If he gets up, just ask him to sit again, but do not give extra treats. (a soft 'good' will suffice!) If he is struggling to hold the sit while you take one step, start with only half a step, or even just picking up your foot, or shifting your weight. Take as small a step as you need for your dog to be successful.

Do NOT use a stay command for this. This exercise is not about your dog holding a position because he was told to. It's about him being comfortable enough that he doesn't feel the need to move.

As you progress; you will want to make a complete circle around your dog. The first time you try, put a treat in your inside hand, and hold it directly in front of his nose. Let him lick your hand as you circle around, and as soon as you get to center, let him have it. Keep your circle tight to his body. As you circle, talk to him; tell him he's good, remind him he's sitting. Keep your voice calm. If you are overly exuberant he will want to jump up and join you! If he keeps getting up, make sure you are keeping your treat hand still. If you are moving it around, he may be following the food! Remember to progress slowly. Start with one step, then two, and build your way up to a complete circle.

As you progress; you will fade out the food, and extend your circle. You should be able to ask your dog to sit and circle around in both directions. Many dogs have a 'good direction' and a direction they struggle with. Don't be surprised if he's brilliant in one direction and just doesn't seem to get it in the other!

Take normal steps; if you shuffle or creep along your dog will wonder what's wrong, and will get up.

When you've gotten really good – you can skip, hop, run, crawl or cartwheel around.

All of this will help your dog build confidence, and learn to tolerate movement, and decrease the chance that he will startle if he should suddenly find someone in his blind spot!

<https://youtu.be/dok8xPhKb8k>