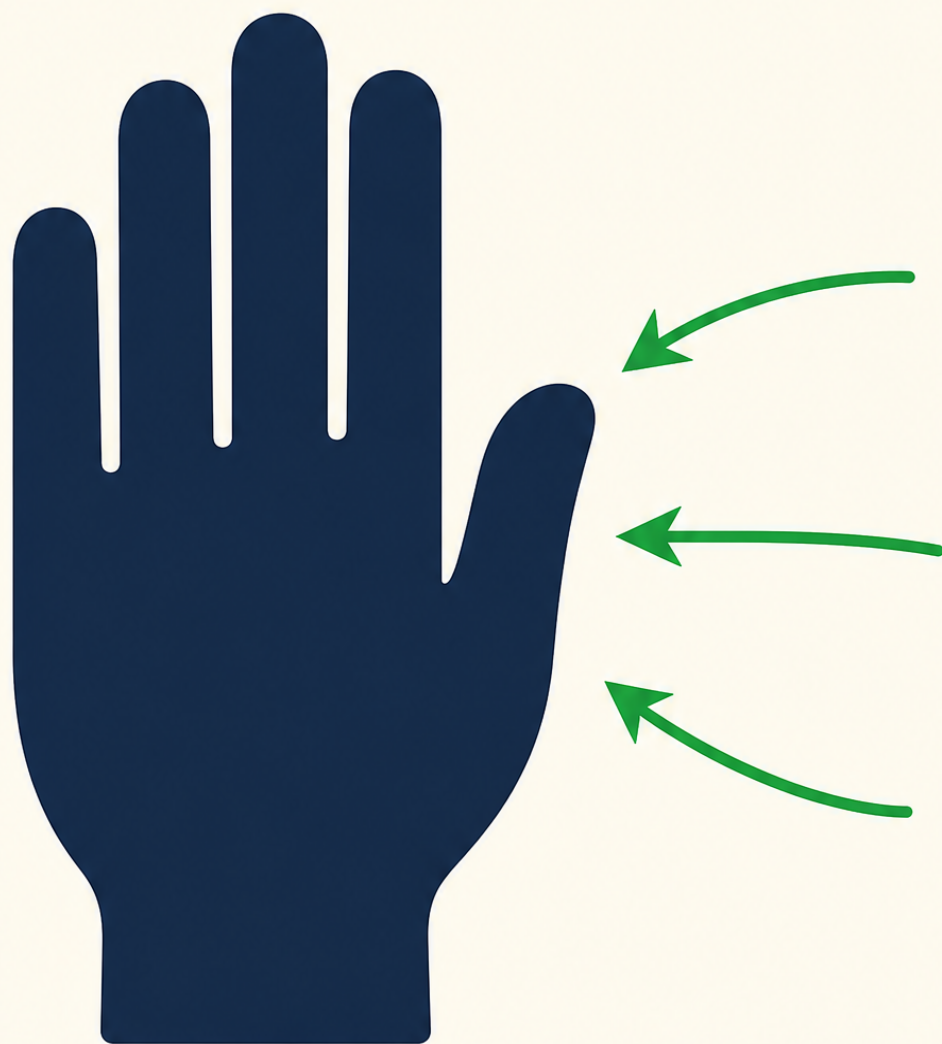


DOG TRAINING HAND SIGNALS

Visual Chart of 12 Essential Commands



Why Hand Signals Matter

Dogs read body language faster than verbal commands. Decades of research show dogs respond to visual cues before they process words — which is why even untrained dogs follow pointing fingers and head nods. Hand signals leverage this for trained behaviors.

When hand signals beat verbal commands

- **Across distances.** A hand signal works at 50+ feet; voice commands fade.
- **In noise.** At a busy park, by the road, around other dogs barking — visual cuts through.
- **For aging dogs.** Most dogs lose hearing in old age. Hand-signal-trained dogs continue to work reliably.
- **For 'silent' work.** Hunting, hiking with wildlife, or any context where you don't want to make noise.
- **For stronger response.** Dogs trained to respond to BOTH a hand signal and verbal cue respond faster than dogs trained on verbal alone.

Train hand signal **FIRST**, verbal **SECOND**

Most trainers do this backwards. Teach the hand signal until it's reliable. THEN add the verbal cue alongside it. The dog learns the signal cleanly, and the word becomes a backup.

Want video demos of every hand signal?

The Fast Dog Training program shows each signal taught from scratch with video. Used by 50,000+ owners.

→ [See the Training Program](#)

The 12 Essential Hand Signals

These are the signals used in AKC obedience and recognized by professional trainers. Variations exist — the key is consistency within your household.

Command	Hand Signal	Use When
Sit	Open palm sweeps up from waist to shoulder height	Greeting people; before meals; impulse control
Down	Open palm starts at shoulder, sweeps down to floor	Long-duration calm; settling at restaurants
Stay	Open palm held flat in front of dog's face	Holding position while you walk away
Come (Recall)	Both arms outstretched, then sweep into chest	Calling dog from distance
Heel	Pat your left hip with open hand	Walking position at your side
Off	Closed fist down at side, then thumb out 'no'	Stop jumping on people or furniture
Leave it	Closed fist held over the item	Drop attention from food/dropped items/dangerous things
Drop it	Open palm flat, fingers down	Release object from mouth
Place	Point with index finger toward the bed/mat	Send to a designated spot
Look (Watch me)	Index finger to your eye, then to dog's eye	Re-focus dog on you in distractions
Wait	Open palm pushed forward toward dog	Pause at thresholds (doors, car)
Finish (sit at heel)	Sweep right hand from front to your left side	Return dog to heel position

How to Teach Each Signal in 3 Sessions

Session 1: Lure

Hold a treat in your hand and use the hand position naturally to lure the dog into the behavior. Example for Sit: hold treat above dog's nose, sweep up and back. Dog naturally sits to follow the treat. Mark and reward. Repeat 5-10 times.

Session 2: Same motion, no treat in hand

Make the same hand motion but with an empty hand. The treat is in your other hand or pouch. Dog performs the behavior on the visual cue alone → mark and reward. Repeat 5-10 times.

Session 3: Add the verbal cue

Now say the word ('Sit') just before the hand signal. Dog responds → mark and reward. Within 10-20 reps, the dog will respond to the verbal cue alone. You now have BOTH cues working.

How long until they're reliable?

Per signal: 3 sessions to teach, 1-2 weeks of daily practice for solid recall in known environments, 2-3 months to proof across distractions. All 12 signals = ~3 months for reliable adult-dog signal work.

Get the complete training program

Video demos for each hand signal, breed-specific tips, and lifetime access. Used by 50,000+ owners.

→ [See the Training Program](#)

→ [Click here to see the program](#)

This chart is free to print and share. For more free resources visit dogtrainingbybreed.com.