

# Advanced training: Head rest



This is a brief overview of the training stages to gradually shape your dog resting their head on the child's lap. If you have a small dog they can be taught to lie across the child's lap using a similar technique. For a body rest, place the target on the floor and encourage them to lie down instead. Head and body rests can be great for children that like deep pressure, can be calming for pre and post-meltdowns and anxiety, and help with anchoring.

Your target can be a flannel, towel, or a special interest blanket. Flannels are useful for taking out and about such as cafes.

1. Be ready with your treat bag, chosen target, and clicker. For more information, see 'Clicker Training & Shaping' handout.
2. Place the target on a chair. Stand behind the back of the chair with your dog in front.
3. Hold a treat to your dog's nose and lure their head down onto the target, then click and treat. Make sure to hold the treat on the target when you reward, so that your dog doesn't lift their head up.
4. Repeat until your dog is reliably following your lure to receive the treat.
5. You can now increase the duration of your dog holding their head on the target, by guiding your dog into position then waiting a second, then clicking and rewarding. You can gradually build this time up at your dog's own pace. If they come out of position, go back a step and progress at a slower pace.
6. Now add your verbal cue such as 'rest' or 'snuggle' by saying the cue whilst your dog is performing the behaviour, and click and reward as usual.
7. Once your dog is consistently and reliably holding their head on the target for 30 seconds, you can introduce a volunteer. Put the target on their lap, and start from step 3 and work up again, asking the volunteer to stay still with their hands by their sides.
8. Introduce things the child may do, like stroking/talking to the dog so the dog is confident, and ask your volunteer to sit in a range of places. Build each step up slowly.
9. Use a different volunteer. If the dog is still confident you're ready to introduce to the child. It is helpful to keep the flannel/blanket as a visual cue for the dog. Some children may feel able to retrieve the target themselves when they feel they need deep pressure or comfort from their dog.

