

# Sit Happens

Tips and Techniques with  
Trudi Thorpe

Dear Trudi,

*My dogs (2) have always slept on the bed with me which up until now has always been my choice as a single girl. My relationship status has recently changed as I'm seeing a really nice guy. He doesn't 'mind' the dogs on the bed but he has allergies and I think it would be better for us all to have my doggies off the bed and out of the bedroom. Ideally I would like them to sleep downstairs but am unsure how to train my doggies to do this. My older dog would probably adapt quite well but my younger girl is prone to howling, crying and pawing at the door. I realise that this is a big change in their home habits but think it's for the best for all of us. Please help so that I can minimise the stress and get a good night's sleep.*

Liesel

Hi Liesel,

It's ok to change things that have been previously established with your dogs as long as you are consistent in implementing the change. What this means is that whilst it's fine to change the dogs' circumstances, it has to be 100% of the time. It will be unfair to have the dogs downstairs when you have company and then back up on the bed when you are on your own – it has to be all or nothing. The reason for this is that you can't rationalise with the dogs or explain why the situation has changed and they are unable to differentiate when is appropriate to sleep on the bed and when it's not. Inconsistency leads to confusion and frustration on the part of the dogs and can therefore manifest itself in other behaviours such as howling, crying and pawing at the door.

There are a number of ways that you can get the dogs to sleep downstairs, but all of them involve a process that you will need to work through to teach the dogs that it is ok to be sleeping away from you. The first one is crating. Crate and Den training is a very basic principle and incorporates the natural instincts of the dogs. Dogs are den animals; they can feel quite comfortable in a semi-enclosed nesting area if they are properly introduced to a crate and the experience is a positive one. Crate training requires quite a bit of work outside of the times that you actually want the dogs to use them and **MUST BE DONE CAREFULLY AND PROPERLY** otherwise the dogs will become anxious and upset at the prospect of being shut in a crate and the results will be totally opposite of those that we want.

Another method for getting the dogs to sleep downstairs would be to confine them to the downstairs area by use of a baby gate across the bottom of the stairs. You would need to start conditioning outside of the times that you were going to sleep at night by going upstairs at different times and leaving them downstairs. Build up the duration of the time that they spend by themselves downstairs at different times of the day so that they start getting used to being downstairs all of the time. Give them something to do while they are down there like a pig's ear to chew on or a treat ball to work on. Provide comfy beds for them to lay on during the day so that they are more apt to using them at night as well. If it's cold downstairs, maybe look at getting them warm jackets to wear. Dogs are opportunists (just like we are), so if a behaviour works for them, they are more inclined to repeat the behaviour and if a behaviour doesn't work for them, the behaviour will diminish over time. Take this into account if the dogs start crying or barking during the training phase of leaving them downstairs and make sure you don't respond to any noises the dogs may make. If you respond in ANY way, the behaviour has worked for the dog and the dog will be more inclined to continue the behaviour.

If downstairs is too big of an area for them to be wandering around in at night, you may consider confining them to one room instead. If this was the case, I would again recommend that you use a baby gate across the door rather than just shutting them away behind a closed door. As with the other management strategies, you would need to train outside of the times that you want to put them in there so that they get used to the new routine.

By using either the crate training or the baby gate methods consistently you should have your bed back and the dogs conditioned to happily sleeping downstairs in no time at all!



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