



Deaf & Blind Dog Training Guide

Name _____

Animal # _____

Microchip # _____

Person # _____

Counselor _____

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Adopting a Deaf Dog

CAN DEAF DOG LIVE A NORMAL LIFE?

Deaf dogs can live totally normal lives. In fact, caring for a deaf dog is not much different than for any other dog. They have the same basic needs: food, water, exercise, enrichment, friendship, and love. But there are some differences to be aware of.

DEAF DOGS CAN'T HEAR A VERBAL RECALL?

Secure outdoor fencing is critical to keep a deaf dog from wandering or running into the street or other dangerous places. A well-fitted collar, comfortable harness and leash should be used when out and about in parks or other areas that aren't fully fenced. A long-line (10 to 50+ foot leash) works well to give deaf dogs the freedom to roam and play, while still being able to retrieve them.

DEAF DOGS DON'T RESPOND TO VERBAL CUES FROM OTHER DOGS

This can be confusing to hearing dogs, especially when they use a gentle grumble warning to a deaf puppy/dog who is being overbearing and they don't respond as expected. It's important to supervise introductions between new deaf puppies or adult dogs and a current resident dog or any other dog they may be meeting. Fortunately, over time, most hearing dogs learn to interact effectively with their deaf canine friends.

DEAF DOGS MAY STARTLE EASILY

To avoid startling them, approach from a direction they can see you. If they are sleeping, a gentle tap or blow of air towards them helps to get their attention. Avoid putting your face and hands in front of their face when they are sleeping, just in case they get startled and snap. Teach young children how to gently approach a deaf dog and supervise as needed.

DEAF DOGS ARE A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT TO CONNECT WITH

Without the ability to use verbal cues and verbal praise, bonding and communication is centered around sight and touch. While this might take time for you to get used to, it comes naturally to most deaf dogs.

HOW TO TRAIN A DEAF DOG

Deaf dogs need and enjoy activities and training just as much as hearing dogs. They can respond to basic dog training with the thumbs-up signal in place of a clicker to indicate that the dog is doing what they are being asked. Once they consistently keep an eye on their person and reliably follow basic hand signals, deaf dogs can participate in agility, rally, nose work, and other competitive canine sports and activities.



Adopting a Blind Dog

LIVING WITH BLIND DOGS

There is a big difference between dogs who are born deaf and blind and those that become blind and/or deaf later in life. Dogs who are born deaf and blind adjust to themselves from day one – they don't know anything different. For dogs who become blind and/or deaf later in life, it takes longer for them to adjust.

- Make feeding and potty times very routine.
- Keep their food and water bowls in the same space.
- Start the dog off in the same spot in the yard for potty breaks.
- At first, keep your blind dog in a limited space such as a pen or small room when no one is home so that they are not trying to navigate large areas of the house alone.
- Be cautious and watchful in new environments so that your dog does not get overwhelmed and stressed without realizing it.

APPROCHING AND GREETING A BLIND DOG

Because a blind dog can't see you, it's important to remember that they may be a little hesitant at first. It is recommended to use a gentle and gradual approach to greeting a blind dog. A blind dog should always be allowed to approach a person at their own will, be given time to smell the air and pick up the scent of the person. It is also important to make a little bit of noise on your approach to let the dog know that you're there. Greet the blind dog with your voice first, then let them sniff your hand and then pet if the dog remains nearby.

INTRODUCING BLIND DOG TO OTHER DOGS

It is recommended to have both dogs on leashes when first meeting but give blind dog the ability to move away if they are showing signs of discomfort (tense body, vocalizing, attempts to leave).

Having a sighted buddy can be really helpful for your blind dog. A seeing companion dog for your blind dog can help show your blind dog the ropes. Remember that a blind dog cannot read the body language and other visual signals that dogs give each other. Make sure to always supervise their interactions and intervene if necessary, especially while the dogs are getting to know each other.

It can also be a good idea to put a little bell or jingly tags on other dogs in home to give your blind dog heads up when other dog is approaching.

Adopting a Blind Dog (Cont.)

ENVIRONMENT AND SURROUNDINGS

- Get down on your hands and knees to your blind dog's level, and look for things that could harm them. Sharp table edges, spaces under bookcases etc. can be hazards for your blind dog.
- When introducing blind dogs to a new space, scatter kibble throughout the house or space. The dog will search for the kibble but since they are using their nose and are moving slowly, they will learn the space with less risk of running into objects.
- Use textures. Textures can be helpful for some blind dogs. For example, in the yard, put rocks around a pool or any other area that should be off limits. When the dog feels the pebbles, they will know they are getting close. Stepping from grass to a sidewalk alerts the dog that they are close to the door and so on.
- Feed your blind dog in the same place and put rugs under the food and water bowls. When they feel texture change, they will learn the location of the bowls.
- Do not rearrange the furniture (or at least do it very seldom if absolutely necessary). Blind dogs are able to "map" the layout of a home or yard. Your dog can have trouble getting around and are more likely to bump into things if furniture is moved around.

TRAINING A BLIND DOG

Use clicker training. A clicker can be very helpful in training blind dogs. Be consistent, which is even more important with blind dogs than sighted ones.

Use voice cues. Teach your blind dogs cues like "watch" for when things are in their way. "Step up" and "step down" is a useful cue when helping blind dog navigate steps/curbs and stairs.

Why are Some Dogs Deaf or Blind

WHAT CAUSES DEAFNESS IN DOGS?

Deaf dogs come in many sizes, shapes, ages, and breeds. Some dogs are born deaf, while other dogs become deaf due to chronic ear infections, injury, toxicity, or aging. The most common cause of congenital deafness is pigment related. If there is un-pigmented skin in the inner ear, the nerve endings atrophy and die off in the first few weeks of the puppy's life, resulting in deafness. Note that you cannot tell the color of hairs in the inner ear by looking at the visible color of the dog's ear. In some cases, hearing loss is asymmetric, meaning there is a different degree of loss in each ear. In others, both ears are affected equally (bilateral deafness). Deafness can also occur in one ear only, which is known as unilateral deafness. While age and injury are common causes of deafness in dogs, two other major factors are genetic disorders and poor breeding practices.

SIGNS OF DEAFNESS IN DOGS?

- No response to sounds or verbal cues from their people or other dogs.
- Deeply sleeping and may startle when woken up abruptly.
- Confusion or behavior changes.
- Excessive barking may be a sign that they are unable to hear themselves.

HOW TO KNOW IF YOUR DOG IS DEAF

1. **At-home dog deafness test**
 - a. Try simple tests like clapping hands or clanging pots and pans behind your dog. Deaf dogs will elicit little to no response, depending on whether or not there is full or partial deafness.
 - b. Assess your dogs response when they are called for. Dogs with asymmetric hearing loss can hear but typically cannot place where sound is coming from. When dogs with unilateral deafness hear their person calling them but don't see them, they will become confused and start searching in the wrong direction, even if person calling them is right behind them.
2. **Get a professional hearing test**
 - a. When common tests fail or are insufficient, some veterinary specialists will recommend BAER (Brainstem Auditory Evoked Response) testing, a more technical way to diagnose deafness. It is most helpful in detecting unilateral deafness since the test confirms which ear is affected.

Why are Some Dogs Deaf or Blind (Cont.)

WHAT CAUSES BLINDNESS IN DOGS?

Dogs go blind due to aging, genetic predispositions, diseases, or injuries. Major causes include cataracts (cloudy lenses), glaucoma (high eye pressure), diabetes induced cataracts, and Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS). Other reasons include infections, high blood pressure or retinal detachment.

SIGNS A DOG IS GOING BLIND?

- Bumping into walls, furniture, or doorframes.
- Reluctance to use stairs or jump on/off furniture.
- Disorientation or getting “lost” in familiar rooms.
- Startling easily or acting anxious.
- Cloudy, red or bulging eyes.

Beginning Sign Training for Deaf Dogs

WHAT IS IT?

We advise to get into the habit of signing to your deaf dog throughout your daily routine instead of just signing in your training sessions. For example, you can use a sign every time you fill up their water bowl, sign when it's time to eat or time to go outside. You can also point in different directions when walking thru the house so they can learn and understand directional signals.

HOW TO PICK VISUAL CUES

If you need help coming up with signs to use as cues for you dog, you can easily look up different signs in ASL (American Sign Language) and use them in your training. Most people come up with their own signs or use combination of ASL for some cues and made up signs for others. The beautiful thing about adopting a deaf dog is that you can create your own language between you and your dog.

HOW TO TEACH IT

The deaf dog/puppy needs to be looking at you directly at you first before you can actually give the dog a sign cue. Your first training should be mini sessions of working on getting the deaf dog look at you. To do this you can touch your nose with your index finger ("watch me" sign) and the minute they look at you give them thumbs up (a.k.a. the marker) and give them a treat. And then repeat, repeat, repeat.

For most other cue you follow the same principle where you give them a specific sign cue and use treat to lure them (put treat by their nose and guide them as if the treat was the magnet) into the place or position you want them to be, mark (thumbs up) and reward (give treat).

TRAINING TIPS

- Be consistent.
- Make sure everyone in home uses the same sign cues (ex: have a little cheat sheet posted on fridge for reference).
- Start by teaching marker cue – thumbs up means you get a treat – without asking for any other behaviors.
- Make training fun and enjoyable for you and your dog.

Tips to Make Training Successful

CATCH YOUR DOG DOING SOMETHING GOOD

Always be prepared to reinforce behaviors you like. The more you let your dog know which behaviors you like, the more likely he will be to repeat them!

ENJOY YOUR DOG

Spend time with your dog outside of training sessions. Really get to know him. What are his likes and dislikes? What captures his attention? What does he have to teach you? Become his friend and partner.

DOGS DO WHAT WORKS

If a dog's actions get him something that he enjoys, he will continue to do those behaviors. If a dog's actions cause something he doesn't like, he will stop doing those behaviors.

TEACH YOUR DOG TO PAY ATTENTION TO YOU

If he is paying attention to you, he can't be paying attention to other distracting things. It will be much easier to redirect your dog's behavior if he will stop and pay attention to you when asked.

REDUCE STRESS

Dogs and humans do not learn well when they are stressed. If you or your dog is stressed, stop training and try again later. Reducing stress in your dog's daily life will help him to be more receptive when it is time to learn new things.

PLAN AHEAD AND SET YOUR DOG UP TO BE SUCCESSFUL

Set up the environment so your dog will make good behavior choices. For example, do not leave the chicken on the table while you leave the room, unless you take the dog with you! Unless you want the dog to eat the chicken!

DOGS REACT TO YOUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

Think positively! Instead of thinking about what you DON'T want your dog to do, create a lovely picture in your mind of what you DO want it to do. Then help to make it happen.

REWARD YOUR DOG

What you use to reward your dog must be something that the dog thinks is special! It isn't enough for YOU to think it's special. Use whatever it is that your dog gets excited about, even if it's not your choice at the time. You will get better effort out of your dog!

Marker Cue

WHAT IS IT?

In dog training, a *marker* is a clear signal that tells your dog “Yes – that exact behavior right there is what I want!” Marker bridges the gap between the behavior and reward, helping your dog understand precisely what they did right. Many people use a clicker but a marker can be anything that your dog perceive by sound, sight or touch. Because we want the dog to look forward to the marker, we follow it with something the dog likes (yummy treat, toy, praise, petting etc). A marker must be clear and crisp and something that can be done the same way every time.

Deaf dogs can be taught to respond to a visual marker like thumbs up or other hand signal. Dogs that are blind and deaf can be taught a touch marker or a gentle blowing of air. When you teach alternate markers, you need to be very careful that you produce the marker as close as possible to the same way each time. Also, be aware that the timing of some markers may be slower than using a clicker or the word “yes”. Ideally, marker should occur as the dog is still doing the behavior you want to draw attention to.

WHY TEACH IT?

Markers are wonderful teaching tools. Dogs get the idea of what’s expected much faster when a marker is used. The marker can pinpoint for the dog the exact behavior that you like so he isn’t left guessing. Usually a dog is showing so many behaviors at once that he may not know which one you are referring to. If my timing is good with the marker, you can help to make my dog more aware of which one of those behaviors you want to see more of.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. Decide which marker you want to teach
 - a. depends if your dog is blind, deaf or both
2. Decide what reward to use
 - a. Yummy treats
 - b. Toys
3. Present the marker signal and immediately present the reward
 - a. For first few sessions present the treat immediately
 - b. You can start to count to 3 and then present the reward as your dog is learning the marker and that it will be followed up by a reward
4. Practice this in few different environments to help them generalize it

Marker Cue (Cont.)

TRAINING TIPS

- Throughout the day, you can use the marker signal to tell your dog which behaviors you like. Now, in order to do this easily, you will need to have the marker signal with you, as well as have the reward with you, at all times.
- When you see a behavior that you like, mark it immediately, preferably while the dog is still doing the behavior. When you mark, the dog will probably stop what he is doing and come to you for the reward. That's ok. That means your dog understood the marker signal. Give the reward and then go back to whatever you were doing.
- Use a marker only for specific behaviors you want to pinpoint to your dog that you like and not every single behavior as this can create some behaviors like inability to relax because your dog is constantly trying to present behaviors just to get rewarded.
- It's important for your dog to have down time away from training also. Learning to relax, take a nap, and chew a bone are important skills for any family dog to learn, and they are best learned through being allowed that down time to just be a dog.

Teaching a Deaf Dog “Watch Me” Cue

WHAT IS IT?

One of the most important sign cues you can teach your deaf dog or hearing dog is the “watch me” sign. It is one of the first signs your deaf dog should learn from you when you start their training program. If you do this exercise often, soon your deaf dog will constantly check in with you all the time.

WHY TEACH IT?

Often good recall can be a question of safety for your deaf dog. If you can recall your deaf dog when they are heading towards danger, you may be saving their life. Remember that all dogs who are visual do watch and respond to our body language very carefully.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. Make sure you start with a high value treat. Put the treat under your dog’s nose as they can get a good scent of what’s in your hand and then move it up towards your face and point at your nose.
2. When the dog makes eye contact with you, mark (thumbs up or other marker signal you have established) and then treat immediately.
3. Do this often and start to move around the home, catch their attention, point at your finger, mark and reward.
4. Once your dog is checking in with you consistently in your home, bring this training with you outside.
5. You can eliminate having the treat in your hand and just start pointing at your nose once the dog is starting to respond reliable. The idea is that you don’t need to be luring them with the treat and they just start to check in on their own because they have learned that making eye contact/checking in is followed by a treat.

TRAINING TIPS

- If your dog isn’t looking at you directly, start by rewarding just the movement of their head upwards.
- You may have to use higher value stinky treats when you are asking for this behavior outdoors as there will be many more distractions than in a home.
- When you do this “watch me” training often try to keep the treat bag out of your dogs view because if you don’t, he will stare at your hand or the treat bag instead of making direct eye contact with you.

Teaching a Deaf Puppy to Use Their Mouth Gently

WHAT IS IT?

Dogs can cause injury to humans if they are not taught to use their mouths gently and to be respectful of human skin. This means it is our responsibility to teach our dogs the behaviors that we like. We cannot expect our dogs to stop using their mouths because it is a normal dog behavior. Just like when we use our hands. But just like we must learn to use our hands gently and appropriately in life, so must our puppies learn to use their mouths gently and appropriately.

Sometimes a dog that is deaf may have a harder time learning to be gentle with its mouth than a dog that can hear. These lessons begin when a dog is still a puppy with their mother and littermates. When one puppy bites another too hard, the one that is being bitten will yelp sharply. This often startles the first puppy into letting go. That puppy learns that in order to continue playing with the other puppies, they need to control the strength of their mouth. Since puppies play with their mouths, they learn to grip each other with less and less pressure.

WHY TEACH IT?

When a puppy enters a human household, they need to learn to control their mouth with their new human family. Human skin is even more fragile than dog skin and is usually not covered with fur as protection, so the puppy needs to learn to be even more careful with us than with other dogs. Our natural reaction when something hurts is to blurt out, “Ouch!” This will often stop the puppy. Some puppies are more persistent than others and continue to bite too hard, but many will learn to play more gently to keep the game going. Obviously, deaf puppies cannot hear the other puppies yelp, or hear us say, “Ouch!” They may need some extra guidance learning to be gentle.

HOW TO TEACH IT

1. One way of letting your puppy know that their play is getting a bit rough is to stop playing every time they bite you too hard. When they bite down too hard, immediately remove yourself from their reach. Remove the body part from the puppy’s mouth gently but matter-of-factly and stand up so the puppy cannot reach you. Exaggerate your body movement and facial expressions to convey your disappointment.

The puppy will recognize the sudden difference in your demeanor. You should also say the word “Ouch!” out loud. Yes, I the puppy is deaf, but saying the words will add to the genuine picture of how your body and face look. It’s important to note here that you should not allow yourself to get angry. Remember that your puppy is just acting like any normal puppy would act while playing or while excited. They are not doing anything wrong; they just need to learn how you would like to be treated during playtime.

Teaching a Deaf Puppy to Use Their Mouth Gently (Cont.)

2. This break doesn't need to be long. Once your puppy calms down, even for a moment, give the marker signal and slowly and calmly return to their level. Allow your body and face to soften back to normal and begin to interact again but more gently and calmly. You must be consistent and end the interaction every time that your puppy bites too hard or plays too roughly. This is how they will learn. With consistency, you may find that just changing your facial expression and withdrawing your hand for a moment is enough of a reminder for the puppy to be gentle.

TRAINING TIPS

- Sometimes puppies can't seem to stop themselves from grabbing everything around them in their mouths. This usually means that the puppy has gotten over-stimulated and needs help to calm down. Giving the puppy some quiet time to calm down is a good idea. It might be a good time to give a special stuffed food toy to occupy puppy's mouth and encourage calmness. Be sure to praise your puppy frequently when they are interacting appropriately with you.
- In teaching our dogs to be gentle with us, it is important for us to also be gentle with our dogs. Playing games that mimic wrestling or slapping of a puppy will encourage them to play more roughly with us. While it may seem cute now with a little tiny puppy, think about that bigger adult dog with much bigger teeth. If you have children, it's especially important for you to model calm and gentle ways for the children and puppy to play together. Show your older children how to appropriately handle the situation if puppy gets too rough. Always supervise and be ready to step in during playtime.
- Keep lots of safe toys and chews around to help redirect your puppy from mouthing things you don't want them to. Chewing on toys can keep a puppy's mouth busy and help them learn appropriate behaviors. When your puppy is mouthing too much or too hard, offer them a toy to chew on instead. Often that will be enough to divert their attention.

A Touch and Treat Game

WHAT IS IT?

Dogs communicate through their use of personal space and most dogs don't automatically like being reached for. Dogs learn to distinguish between pleasant reaching and not-so-pleasant reaching based on the person's voice tone and body language. Dogs are very good at learning which of our signals lead to an experience that won't be very nice for them.

WHY TEACH IT?

It's important to teach every dog to allow people to calmly reach for and hold his collar. Not only are there situations in our everyday lives when we use a hand on our dog's collar or body, but in an emergency situation, being able to get hold of your dog quickly and easily could save his life.

With a deaf or blind-deaf dog, you will not be able to rely on your voice to be reinforcing, encouraging, or praising. A deaf dog will only see you reaching and lunging toward it suddenly. It is important to keep your facial and body language as calm as possible when you do need to reach for your dog. Deaf dogs in particular are very observant to any visual cue. They will learn to react to even the slightest changes in your body language that indicate you are getting ready to reach for them. It's best to teach your dog to enjoy being reached for before habits of moving away develop.

HOW TO TEACH IT TO A DEAF DOG

1. Gently reach towards your dog and offer a treat with the other hand.
 - a. It's not necessary to actually touch the dog at this point
 - b. The motion of you reaching leads to a good thing like treats
 - c. Only reach a few inches first
2. The treat should come immediately after your arm reaches.
 - a. If dog is vary of the reach you may need to move your hand only slightly and toss the treat as close to them as possible
3. As the dog gets more comfortable with this you can start to reach closer and closer to their body.
 - a. Don't grab or touch your dog just yet at this point
 - b. Make it a game – reach and treat, touch and treat
4. Start to vary how you reach. Sometimes reach faster and feed, sometimes touch a bit firmer and feed, touch different parts of their body and feed.
 - a. Touch their neck + treat
 - b. Touch their collar + treat
 - c. Gradually progress to holding the collar for short periods of time + treat, grabbing the collar more quickly + treat, hold the collar for longer period of time + treat

A Touch and Treat Game (Cont.)

HOW TO TEACH IT TO A BLIND OR BLIND AND DEAF DOG

1. No need to focus so much on the reaching part because the dog won't see your hand coming.
 - a. Some dogs will react to your hand being close to them so start to feed for your hand just coming close to your dog
 - b. Progress gradually to touching your dog and immediately offer a treat right in front their nose
2. Practice giving treats each time you suddenly touch your dog.
3. Don't make them smell around for the treat Feed the treat directly to your dog and feed it quickly so they associate the treat with touch.
4. With practice your blind or blind-deaf dog will start to "look" around at your touch expectantly, waiting for a treat instead of startling or trying to move away.

TRAINING TIPS

Keep in mind that the idea here is not to "test" your dog and see if you can get a reaction from him. The idea is to move slowly through the steps so he feels comfortable with however you touch or reach for him. Going slowly and giving extra treats at each stage is much preferable to rushing and risking pushing your dog too far. Going slower gives you more chances to condition your reach and touch as a positive thing in your dog's mind. This is a game. You and your dog should both be enjoying the experience!

The teaching you are doing with this exercise may one day be your safety net. You may need to grab and get hold of your dog quickly. If you've done your homework and played the Touchy-Feely game, your dog will allow you to catch him easily and will look forward to whatever comes next. Continue to play this game throughout your dog's life. Move fast and slow and reach from various angles. Keep it fun and always use great treats!

Teaching a Deaf Dog to Wake Up Gently

WHAT IS IT?

There is a myth that deaf dogs are dangerous because they will bite when they are startled or woken up. Could this ever happen? Yes, it could. But it could also happen with a dog that can hear. Does it happen a lot? No. Most deaf dogs are no threat when startled. Can this scenario be prevented? Yes, definitely!

WHY TEACH IT?

You can teach your deaf dog to wake up easily and happily. By teaching this skill to your new dog, you can prevent this issue from developing. Start training when your dog is awake and paying attention to you. Let your dog see you reaching towards them. Touch your dog and give them a yummy treat immediately. Don't wait to see what your dog will do. There should be no lag time. Make these really special treats. You want your dog to really look forward to being touched.

HOW TO TEACH IT

Repeat this pattern of touch and treat many times quickly in succession. Then touch your dog and pause for just a moment before giving the treat. The sequence will become – touch, dog looks expectantly for treat, and then feed. Don't pause too long, just long enough for your dog to show you that he knows the treat should come next. You are teaching the dog to associate your touch with a treat.

In future sessions, touch different parts of your dog's body. One touch = one treat. As your dog becomes more tolerant of you touching various parts of their body, sneak in a random touch now and then when your dog is not expecting it. Be ready with that treat immediately.

TRAINING TIPS

When your dog is sleeping, be respectful. Don't wake your dog up unless it's necessary. When you do need to wake your dog up, do it gently. Walk heavier as you approach your dog so he can begin to feel the vibrations through the floor. When you get close to your dog, blow on them gently to wake it up. If your dog is lying on a blanket, you can wiggle the edge of the blanket to gently shake them awake. If your dog is still asleep, you can progress to gently brushing your hand on your dog's body, almost like giving them very light pets. It is best to touch your dog on their body, not face.

IMPORTANT TO KNOW

Be prepared for a startle if your dog is sleeping soundly. Startling is a normal response. Just make sure that you are quickly offering your dog something wonderful – a treat, toy, pets! Usually, the dog will recover immediately once he sees or smells you, and when you offer something tasty to eat, he will forget all about being startled. Be aware that if your dog is blind-deaf, you may need to use your hands to steady them as they wake up. He will not be able to see you nearby, so maintaining a

Teaching a Deaf Dog to Wake Up Gently (Cont.)

firm but gentle touch on their body will let them know you are there, while you offer the food right near his nose.

You won't need to offer the treat forever, but it's a good idea to give a tasty treat every now and then as a reminder that unexpected touch is a good thing. The more you follow a startling touch with something wonderful (treat, playtime, petting), the happier your dog will be about it. It is important that you protect your dog from unexpected touches that could be unpleasant (ex: guests in home or when out on walks). If someone else startles your dog, be ready to step in and make it a happy experience for the dog.

Remember that startling is a normal response. You probably won't ever get rid of it completely. But you can diminish how much the startle bothers your dog by rewarding frequently. And with lots of practice, you may notice your dog waking up easier and easier each time!