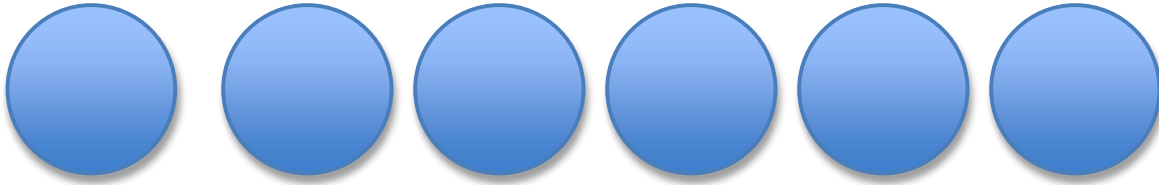


## Outnumbered!



**Are you feeling a little outnumbered? Find that it's like herding cats when trying to organise your dogs for a training session?  
It's time to take control.**

### Sarah Whitehead

For those of us who live with multiple dogs, the reasons to do more training are obvious.

- More dogs = potentially more arousal in the group.
- More dogs = potentially less control.
- More dogs = potentially more problems.

Notice that I say potentially. I think that most people who live with more than one dog will agree that there is much joy to be had from seeing multiple dogs interact and enjoy each other's company, but there is also the potential for more problems, as excitement levels can quickly rise amongst dogs living in a group. There is also the potential for less overall control where humans are outnumbered – simply because we only have one pair of eyes and two hands – and because, most importantly, the more dogs you have, the more time you need to put in to training each of them separately.

Over and over again, in lectures and training seminars, I am asked how to manage the practical realities of training when someone owns more than one dog. You get the clicker or the treats out and they all get excited. They jostle with each other for attention and your good intentions quickly evaporate as you realise that trying to get one dog on their own is as simple as herding cats, because they all want to be involved. You try and shut the rest away so that you can give one dog individual attention, and the others all bark and scratch at the door to come and join you. Finally get one on their own, and you are so exhausted with the palava so far that training is not enjoyable, fun or focused.

So, what are your options?

#### 1. Manage the situation

For some people this is still the easiest option, but it does take some pre-planning. Taking the one dog that you want to train with and shutting the other dogs in a different room, or even the car, can actually resolve a number of different problems all at once, but you need to understand that the dogs that aren't being actually trained still need input if they are to cope with the frustration of

hearing one of their buddies being trained in another room.

How you choose to do this will depend a little on your own environmental set-up, as well as your dogs' preferences. For example, you could give the 'resting' dogs stuffed Kongs in another room while you train the 'chosen one' in another. In order to start this, I would give all the dogs Kongs, but split them up. This way, all the dogs are enjoying the same reward, but getting used to being apart for short periods. Once this is established as a routine, and the dogs are happy to be apart because they know that good things are coming, I would do some very short, quiet sessions of training with one dog, while the others chew their Kongs - and then swap them over.

The success or failure of this strategy will depend on the ability to recognise that you are actually training all the dogs simultaneously to cope with low levels of frustration. You need to build it up slowly, in tiny stages, so that each dog is able to carry on with chewing, even while another in the family is doing something different. It's vital that the 'resting' dogs don't see this as being held in a kind of doggie 'waiting room', just waiting for their turn.

From a practical point of view, this kind of training works best if you can put a physical barrier between the dogs. Visual barriers tend to be ideal - which is why putting them in another room or in the car works well. However, for those who have open-plan houses and no car, this clearly isn't an option. It's also inappropriate where the dogs may fight over resources or where they just can't cope with being separated (although if this is the case then you have a different problem that needs to be resolved!)

## 2. Train the dogs as a group.

So, option two is to train the dogs as a group. In this scenario, some or all of the dogs stay in the same room, and you can choose to train one or more with the others present. Those that are being trained should be attentive and having fun, while those that are not should be relaxed - and should not try to interfere with your training.

So, how is this possible? The answer (like everything!) is practise.

Here are the rules:

1. All the dogs must know how to settle down.
2. The dogs that are relaxing must get just as many (if not more) rewards than the dog or dogs being trained.
3. All the dogs need to know their names - and respond to them individually.
4. The dogs need to be relatively calm - especially in the early stages.

How to start:

1. With all the dogs in the same room, ask them all to settle down. This is different from a formal stay, and is preferable because the dogs are OK to move about as long as they are generally restful rather than up-and-at-em active. Catch the dogs in the act of relaxing, and give rewards by popping a treat in front of them on the floor (or sofa!). Repeat this often.

2. Once the dogs get the hang of this, start to move around and make some gentle sounds while the dogs are in the settle. Reward them for staying calm and quiet.

3. Build on these sessions, by quietly saying the name of one dog and luring him or her towards you while the rest are settled. As soon as this dog is even standing up, pop a reward in front of the others, to reinforce them for staying in the same place.

3. Do just a few seconds of lure/reward training with your chosen dog. (I tend not to use the clicker at this stage even if the dogs are clicker-wise because one click and they all leap to their feet in anticipation!) Make sure that for every reward the 'chosen' dog gets for correct behaviour, the others all get one for remaining calm and relaxed. Bear in mind that your primary focus is in training the settled dogs, not the active one – so keep the exercises simple.

4. If at any stage any of the other dogs get up, stop training, calmly settle all the dogs back down and start again (but don't reward the dog that got up without being asked!).

5. Keep sessions short and sweet. Your aim is to build on the resting dogs' natural capacity for energy-saving by rewarding them for doing nothing much. This may take a little time and practise but is truly worth the effort. Take a look at one of Emily Larlham's 'Kikopup' video clips on YouTube if you want to see the finished result. It's an excellent lesson.

Title: "Training Sessions with Multiple Dogs" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfRrBH\\_beX8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfRrBH_beX8)

#### Solo behaviour

If you live with a multi-dog group, and you are experiencing behavioural problems with one or more of them, it's nigh-on impossible to resolve your issues without being able to assess and train each one individually. This is most especially the case where the dog or dogs are aggressive or defensive towards other dogs when out on walks. In these cases you need to expect to teach all the dogs in your family to cope with being trained and even exercised separately.