

Introducing Your Dog To Stairs



Sighthounds and Stairs

If your home has stairs, they may pose a challenge for your Forever Hounds Trust dog. Many of our hounds have never seen stairs before and have no idea of how to negotiate them. This can be a daunting experience, and it can take a while for dogs to become confident enough to safely walk up and down them.

Every dog is an individual and you will find that some dogs like to go up the stairs and some dogs like to go down. Some dogs may go halfway up or down the stairs and then freeze, and refuse to move in either direction, and some dogs simply won't attempt the stairs. Whatever your dog's response to the stairs, you can help them adjust to the challenge.



Safety Considerations

If your stairs are very steep, it may not be appropriate for your dog to learn how to tackle them, due to the risk of injury.

If your dog is on restricted exercise or has other health issues, stairs may have to remain off limits. If this is the case, it is a good idea to install a baby/stair gate to prevent your dog from climbing the stairs.

Types Of Stairs & Flooring

If your stairs are wooden or open, your dog will struggle to grip the stairs and may be worried by the openings between steps. To help your dog, you will need to add some treads/carpet that provide grip.

If your hallway or landing is not carpeted and is a wooden/laminate or tiled floor, there is an increased risk of your dog slipping and injuring themselves when they go up or down the stairs. To prevent this, we recommend that you use non-slip runners or rugs (with anti-slip rug grippers) to provide suitable traction.

Introducing the stairs

When you start introducing your dog to the stairs, it is important to keep training sessions brief (no more than 5 minutes) and to remain calm and patient. It may take more than one day for your dog to become accustomed to stairs.

It is imperative that you DO NOT force your dog to go up or down the stairs by dragging them by their collar. If you lose your patience, stop training and give yourself and your dog a break. If you use force, you will undermine your relationship and bond with your dog and this will affect other areas of training.

Before you start your training session, make sure that you have some high value food rewards (little pieces of chopped cheese, chicken, sausage work well), and that your dog is wearing their harness. You may also find it beneficial to have a second helper and to have your dog's lead handy.

Going Upstairs

- Put a treat on the first stair and encourage your dog to eat it. Repeat this several times.
- Put a treat on the second stair and encourage your dog to eat it. Repeat this several times.
- Put a treat on the next stair, slightly out of reach for your dog.
- Ensure that your helper is on the stairs in front of your dog and the treat, and that you are behind them to provide security that they will not fall backwards.
- At this stage, your dog should be confident enough to put a paw (or two) on the stairs to reach the treat.
- Praise your dog when they reach for the treat.
- Ask your helper to encourage the dog to continue up the stairs, by luring them with treats.
- Remain behind your dog, following them up the stairs.
- Ensure that your helper feeds them treats while they move up the stairs and that you praise them.



- If your dog feels insecure at any time, you can gently hold their harness or attach a lead to the back of the harness to help increase their sense of security.

Coming Downstairs

Going downstairs can present more of a risk of injury, as your dog may attempt to jump several stairs at once or run down too quickly and lose grip. You will need to supervise your dog and ensure that you NEVER let them attempt to go up and down the stairs by themselves, until you are sure that they understand the concept of taking one step at a time.

- Attach your lead to your dog's harness (by the attachment point on your dog's back) and shorten the lead, so that your dog can't race in front of you.
- Holding the lead in your hand closest to your dog, encourage your dog to take one step at a time, as you walk down by them.
- Take things slowly and remember to praise and reward your dog on each step.
- Repeat this exercise and ALWAYS accompany your dog when they go downstairs, until you are sure that they are confident enough to do so safely.

Further help

If your Forever Hounds Trust dog is struggling to adjust to a home environment and finds stairs a challenge, please do contact our post homing support team for support and advice. You can contact the team by emailing: behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org

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