



Teaching **Leave-It**

Goal: The key to a reliable “Leave-it” command is to teach your dog that if he leaves something alone when you ask him to, he might score something even better! We will start by teaching the basics of Leave-it and then work up to having your dog look at you when you say the command.

Exercise 1: With two fists full of training treats, present your hands to the dog and say “Leave-it” and wait to see the dog’s reaction. They will likely sniff, lick, paw, and nibble at both hands to try to get the treat. The second they pull away from your hand, mark with the verbal cue “YES!” and reward them with a treat from the fist they were NOT paying attention to. Example: if the dog was smelling your right hand and they look away, mark with a “yes!” and reward them with a treat from your left hand. Make sure to only give one treat at a time. This exercise is designed to begin to teach them the basics of Leave-It.

Exercise 2: The dog can be on or off leash for this exercise. You will want to be sitting for the start of this exercise. Place a treat on the floor and ask the dog to “Leave-it”. When the dog goes for the treat, cover it with your hand. This may require patience! When they leave the treat alone and look at you, mark with “YES!” and reward them a treat from your other hand. This training exercise is designed to teach them to look at you when you say the command. Once you are able to repeat this a few times in a row successfully, you will want to challenge the dog by beginning to hover your hand over the treat instead of covering it. Ask the dog to “Leave-it” and when they listen and look at you instead, mark and reward with a treat. The final objective with this exercise is to be able to stand up and ask the dog to “Leave-it”. Use your foot if you need to cover the treat so they don’t get to it. When the dog leaves the treat alone and looks at you instead, mark and reward.

Exercise 3: This exercise is to help build a foundation for the command while the dog is on leash. With the dog on leash and the leash in your hand, toss a treat near the dog but not close enough that the dog can get to it. The dog will likely have tension on the leash as they are trying to get to the treat. Ask the dog to “Leave It” and wait for their reaction. As soon as they give up on trying to get to the goodie on the floor and look at you, mark with a “YES!” and reward them with a treat. Repeat this exercise until you are able to have the dog “Leave-it” immediately and look at you.

Generalizing Leave-It: Once your dog is able to do the 3 exercises above consistently, you will want to begin utilizing this command in real world interactions. You can begin to interchange items in the above exercises for other interesting items such as articles of laundry, safe pieces of trash, or toys. You can also incorporate this command in daily leashed walks by planting “bait” items like toys or treats along your planned route. Ask the dog to “Leave-It” and mark and reward when they listen and look at you.