



TEACHING LEAVE IT

Why teach your dog leave it?

The leave-it command is great for calling your dog away from things not intended for him, like appetizers set out on your coffee table or a baby's toys or diaper, or things that are downright dangerous, like chicken bones left on the street or in the trash.

How to train it.

Step 1. Place a treat in your hand and show it to your dog but don't let him get it. Close your hand and make a fist. Hold your fist at your dog's nose level and don't move it. Ignore any sniffing and pawing.

Step 2. As soon as your dog pulls away or loses interest, click, then open your hand and give him the treat.

Step 3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 until your dog no longer sniffs your hand and immediately turns/back away.

Step 4. When your dog is reliably performing Step 3, say "Leave It!" and present your fist as before.

Step 5. When your dog is leaving the treat in your closed fist, open your hand and say "Leave It!". If he tries to get the treat, immediately close your hand. When he backs off, open your fist. Continue until he will leave the treat in the open hand alone. Click and treat your dog for backing away from your hand.

Step 6. Place the treat on the floor and make sure your dog knows it's there.

Step 7. Stand or kneel close to the treat with your foot or hand ready to lightly cover it if your dog decides to try to take it.

Step 8. If your dog moves away from the treat, click and hand the treat, or a different treat, to your dog. Repeat until your dog is readily moving away from the exposed treat.

Step 9. Once he is reliably performing step 8, add the cue "Leave It!" as he moves away from the treat or stops trying to get it.

Step 10. Say, "Leave It!" and drop the treat from 6" off the floor. Be ready to cover it if he tries to get it.

Step 11. Work in different environments and add distractions.

Step 12. Place treats on a dining table, coffee table, sofa, chair, or counter. Stay within arm's length so you can cover up the treats if needed. You can place them on a plate to imitate real life.

Step 13. When you get a 100% success rate with 10 trials (your dog never tries to go for the treats on the table), add distance between yourself and the table. Ask someone to help protect the food if needed or have your dog on a leash to stop him from getting at the food if he tries.



LEAVE IT (CONTINUED)

Step 14. Generalize the behavior to objects such as balls, toys and sticks. Place an object on the floor that your dog is not interested in, such as a book. Allow a short sniff and then ask your dog to "Leave it". When he does, click and treat. If he does not respond within a couple of seconds, use a treat to lure him from the object. When he is turned toward you click/treat. Repeat over and over. Eventually most dogs will lose interest in the item and will be looking at you. Reward and end the session for now. Repeat this step many times with all kinds of items. Keep the value of the object low for now. Just keep doing lots of reps.

Step 15. When your dog has gotten really good at responding to your "Leave it" cue for lots of different things, it is time to use it with any stimuli that causes your dog to react, such as other dogs or people. When you see something that she typically would react to, tell her to leave it. If she does, praise and reward. If she doesn't, lure her head while taking a step backwards so that her head turns toward you, and then reward.

Distraction Ideas to Practice

- Put food or trash on the ground and practice leave it while you and your dog walk by. Begin by passing at a good-sized distance and work your way closer and closer to the enticing object as your dog gets better at the exercise.
- You can do this with anything you see. When your dog notices the object or person, tell him, "Leave it" and reward any response of looking toward you. Just be sure to stay far enough away for your dog to be unable to reach the object.

Training Tip: The sooner you give the command, the better. If your dog is already intrigued by an object, it is much harder for him to leave it alone.

Training Tip: The reward should always come from your hand, either from the pile on the table or floor or a different treat that is either the same type or something better. This teaches the dog that he may not always get what you ask him to leave. He can only have it if you give it to him.

Training Tip: Once your dog starts leaving a variety of different objects, begin to click and treat him for leaving things such as dogs, fast-moving objects such as cars, cats, dead things on the sidewalk, etc. Practice with these as you would with any other object.

Troubleshooting: Initially, if your dog is having trouble leaving the treat, use one of lesser value such as a piece of kibble. As your dog becomes more successful, increase the value of the object.