

Leave It

There will be times when your dog is going to be doing something that he shouldn't be doing. Teaching your dog the cue "Leave It" is a perfect way to call your dog's attention away from the thing that he shouldn't be messing with and give him something more acceptable to do. The following training plan will teach your dog just that.

What it Means

The definition of the cue "Leave It" will mean to your dog "Stop paying attention to what you are paying attention to, look at me, and I will give you something amazing in return." We must always reward our dog's decision to leave something alone that we have told them to. You can reward your dog with play, praise, or food.

Getting Started

Start with a handful of treats in each palm, fists closed. Put one hand behind your back and offer the other closed fist to your dog. As the dog is sniffing/licking/pawing at your hand say "Leave It" (Only say it one time, do not repeat the cue more than once). As soon as the dog stops sniffing/licking/pawing at your hand tell your dog "good job/yes/good/good boy/good girl" and give them a treat out of the other hand. Repeat until the dog stops sniffing/licking/pawing when you say "Leave It".

Next, offer your open palm full of treats to the dog and say "Leave It" (Only say it one time, do not repeat the cue more than once). If the dog tries to get the treats, close your fist. As soon as your dog stops paying attention to your hand, tell your dog "good job/yes/good/good boy/good girl" and give them a treat out of the other hand. Repeat until you can show your dog an open palm full of treats without your dog going for it.

Then, place a pile of treats on the floor and immediately cover the treats with your hand. When your dog sniffs/licks/paws at your hand, say "Leave It" (Only say it one time, do not repeat the cue more than once). As soon as the dog stops, tell your dog "good job/yes/good/good boy/good girl" and give them a treat out of your other hand. Do not give your dog a treat from the floor.

When you are done with a session pick up all the treats from the floor and put them away. After several repetitions you should begin lifting your hand off of the food and see if your dog still leaves the food alone. If they do not, cover it back up with your hand. Repeat until the dog stops giving attention to the treats on the floor as soon as you say "Leave It". After that, stand up and try repeating the last step but covering the treat with your foot rather than your hand.

Tips

Remember that for this training, you must be faster than the dog. If you aren't, your dog gets the treat that he wasn't supposed to get rather than learning that leaving the treat alone gets him an equal or greater treat from your hand. Also, remember to start slow and only progress to the next step when you know your dog will be successful at the next step.

Finally, never, ever, ever let your dog have the item that you asked them to leave so they don't become confused. If you have asked them to leave food along on the floor and then you want to let them have it you should pick the food up off the floor and then give it to them or, better yet, just give them treats from the treat jar, your treat pouch, or treats that you already have in your hand.

After your dog has successfully mastered all of the steps above you can begin using "Leave It" in other scenarios of life. Start with when your dog is looking at something or sniffing something for 3 seconds or more, ask your dog to "Leave It" and if you have done your training correctly, your dog should turn and look at you because he is expecting that you will give him a treat from your hand. When he does you will have to give him a treat. If your dog does not respond to the cue in a these scenarios then you will need to go back and repeat the steps above.

If your dog does respond in these scenarios, keep practicing until your dog is able to master leaving things that he is just looking at or sniffing and move on to more challenging things such as other dogs, toys, tempting plates of people food, etc. As your dog masters each of these scenarios, you can reduce the value of the reward in easier situations. For example, if you have asked your dog to leave something that he is sniffing, you can reward with a simple "good dog/good boy/girl" and a scratch on the chin rather than using treats every time but you should always reward your dog, even if just with praise, any time he chooses to comply with your request. This will ensure a strong bond and a willingness to please from your dog.