

Training Exercise for New Lisbon Raisers

Prepared by John Fetters on June 10, 2020

Leave It

Dogs often like to pick things up off the ground inside and outside and sometimes they eat what they pick up. Depending on what that thing is this could be either unhealthy or even dangerous for the dog. Therefore, we need to teach dogs to “Leave It” when they see something interesting or appealing on the ground. The ability to do this is important to becoming a guide dog. The ultimate goal in training this is for the dog to ignore anything and everything on the ground WITHOUT being told to “leave it”. Why? Because a blind person cannot see what the dog is doing and wouldn’t know to give this command. So, like teaching all commands we’ll start off with some simple techniques and gradually build upon them. Our professional dog trainer has taught us these techniques and we’ve practiced them at different classes. You’ll be utilizing the “collar grab” technique you learned last week.

Leave It - It’s Your Choice

(these games are taken from Susan Garrett’s agility foundation exercises at Say Yes!)

This is a great foundation exercise to teach your dog impulse control. Impulse control is necessary and is very helpful in your home with your canine companion. Impulse control is your dog showing self-control, instead of you nagging your dog—imposed control. The goal of this exercise is to teach your dog impulse control all around. These games also teach the dog how to make choices, how to tolerate frustration, and recovery (the value in trying again). This behavior grows into so many other behaviors, including helping a dog make a better choice even when stressed.

Level 1:

Shape the behavior. Put some treats in an open hand. Offer your hand to your dog so he may inspect it. He might try to paw at it, sniff it or mouth it—if so, immediately shut the hand like a Venus Fly Trap. The moment he stops investigating your hand (this could be because he gave up, got bored or distracted), open the hand. If your dog leaves the hand alone, say “Good boy” or “Yes” and reward by taking one treat out of the open hand with your other hand (visualize plucking a berry off a bush).

Turn up the heat and move to the floor. Put the treats on the floor with your hand nearby to cover it in case your dog goes for it. Slowly fade your hand out of the picture by moving it further away on each trial.

More Level 1 Games:

Add height. Drop only one treat a few inches from the floor. Be ready to pounce on it if your dog goes for it. If she doesn’t then praise her (“YES”) and give her the treat. In each progression, raise the treat a little higher from the floor. You may need to use your foot to cover it once you get too high to quickly cover it with your hand.

Level 2 Games:

Get creative with different ways to make the choice harder for your dog. Here are a few suggestions.

Add movement. Drop several treats from a few inches off the ground. Be ready to cover them if your dog goes for it.

Make sure not to give any vocal corrections—it’s about your dog making the choice, not you making the choice for him. Increase the height as your dog continues to be successful. Every time they ignore the treats on the floor, praise them and give them one of the treats.

Decorate the dog. Put treats on your dog as he lays in a down position. If he goes for the treat, quickly remove it or cover it with your hand. Reward him by picking up the treat off his paw (or from wherever else you place them) and give it to him. You might need to start by placing the treats near his paws before you start placing them on his paws.

Goodies Around the World. Place all sorts of potentially reinforcing things around your dog (treats, toys, treat bags, bowl of food). Reward your dog with treats for holding a sit or down position or release your dog and play with a toy you've placed on the ground. If he gets up while you are placing the goodies on the ground, simply take him by the collar (a collar grab) to pause the game and wait for the controlled position (sit or down). If he does not offer it within 20-30 second, you may let go of the collar and re-cue the position. He only receives a reward after holding the position for a few seconds.

Level 3 Games:

This is a good game for both handlers to do together since it requires some advance set up when the dog is out of sight. One person can stay in their cell with the dog while the other person sets up a distracting obstacle course. Using something like a paper towel, napkin or plate place a few tasty food items on it. This can be a few treats, kibble or even pieces of human food. Or it can be leaves, twigs, candy wrappers, cigarette butts or rabbit poop. Whatever things that you know that the dog likes to pick up off the ground and finds irresistible but is being trained to ignore. Prepare 1 of these and place it in a random area on the ground where you will be walking the dog. This is something worth practicing both indoors and outdoors.

Since you know where the piles of goodies were placed but the dog doesn't you'll be able to observe their behavior as you approach them on a walk.

With your dog on leash, start taking your walk and moving past the first goodie pile without getting too close. If your dog doesn't pull towards it, praise profusely and reward her generously. If your dog does start pulling towards it, grab her collar with your left hand without saying a word and gently & calmly make a right turn away from the treats on floor and make a circle walking back while holding her collar so you can start over. Before walking past it again, stop and wait to see what your dog does. If she is still obsessing on the item, do another collar grab and circle farther back away from the treats. If she acknowledges you in any way, then you can try again by walking past the item. If she is successful, praise profusely and reward her generously. Repeat several times and each time make it harder by walking a little closer to the goodie pile.

Remember, do NOT say "Leave it" when the dog notices the pile of goodies. The goal is for the dog to think for themselves, exhibit the proper impulse control and make the correct choice in that situation.

Your dog is allowed to notice the item, just not go for it. It's okay if the dog just glances at the treats on the floor as you walk past but regains focus on you or looks ahead. That's still acceptable because she didn't pull towards it and this behavior merits praise and a treat.

If your dog continues to fail, you might need to give a wider arc around the item or switch to a less interesting item to start. If that doesn't work, it's probably best to return the dog to their crate for a "time out" and try again later.

If your dog does well and can walk past 1 pile of goodies then you can up the ante and you can increase the value of the item. You can also set up 2 or 3 piles of goodies and place them in different locations on the floor to create a gauntlet. Change the locations of where you place these piles each time you train this so the dog doesn't anticipate the locations where they will encounter them. The idea is to teach your dog to show impulse control while checking in with you for permission.

Level 4 Proofing the Behavior

Once they have mastered the ability to walk past 2-3 piles of treats on the floor and ignore them, it's time to test them in other ways. IE:

- put some food on the floor before the dog gets out of the crate and see if they'll ignore it.
- Purposely and unexpectedly drop a treat on the floor while on a walk and see what the dog does
- Or intentionally let a small piece of human food "accidentally" fall off the table onto the floor while eating and watch what the dogs does.