



Game #1 for Self Control Ignoring food

This simple game will help your dog learn to wait for what he wants. It can be the foundation for an excellent "Leave It", "Wait", and similar cued behaviors, but it's equally valuable as an uncued default behavior when in the presence of tempting items (e.g. food) and opportunities (e.g. going through a door or gate).

You'll need some low to medium-value treats.

Stage 1

1. Load 10-15 small treats into one hand
2. Hold your clicker in the other hand, resting easily by your side.
3. Close your treat hand around the treats so that your dog can't get them.
4. Place the treat hand at or just below your dog's nose level,
5. Brace your hand so that you won't be tempted to pull it away from your dog.
6. If your dog has noticed the treats in your hand and is trying to get them, that's great! It's where the exercise starts.
7. Hold your treat hand steady, and keep it closed as long as your dog is trying to get the treats out. When your dog moves away from your hand, click or use your verbal marker, open your hand, remove a treat and give it to him with the other hand.

Stage 2

1. Load 10-15 small treats into one hand.
2. Place the treat hand at or just below your dog's nose level,
3. Brace your hand so that you won't be tempted to pull it away from your dog.
4. Keep your treat hand open.
5. If your dog moves toward your open hand, close it, and wait for your dog to move away to reopen it.
6. If your dog doesn't move toward your open hand, leave it open, click or use your verbal marker, remove a treat with your other hand, and feed it to your dog.
7. You're not saying anything to your dog, just opening your hand when your dog moves away, closing it when he moves toward the treats, and clicking/marking and giving him treats when he moves away from your open hand.

Stage 3

1. Place 8-10 treats on the floor in front of your dog
2. Place your hand over the treats
3. Leave your hand over the treats as your dog tries to get them.
4. Move your hand away to reveal the treats when your dog backs away.
5. Click or use your verbal marker, then take a treat from the pile on the floor and feed it to your dog.

6. Add difficulty by taking a single treat from the pile and placing it on the floor a little closer to your dog, then click/mark, pick it up, and feed it to your dog.
7. If at any time your dog moves toward the treats, simply put your hand over them.
8. Don't say "no" or anything else. This works like a law of nature: the dog moves toward the treats and your hand covers treats on the floor. Your dog moves away, and your hand uncovers them and gives your dog one of the treats.

Stage 4: Add a Cue

Once your dog is reliably moving away from the food at each stage of this exercise, you can add a cue such as "leave it", or "off", delivered in a happy voice. For this exercise you'd simply present the closed or open hand with treats, or the treats on the floor with your hand over them, say the cue in a happy voice, and repeat the exercise.

Note that if your dog makes a mistake you do not scold, say "no", or repeat your cue. You simply close your hand around the treats, wait for the desired behavior of moving away, mark and reward, and continue the exercise. If your dog is finding it hard, go back to an earlier stage of the exercise.

This simple approach is based on "Zen" as taught by Sue Ailsby (sue-eh.ca), and "It's Yer Choice" as taught by Susan Garrett (www.clickerdogs.com). Any flaws in protocol are my own. I have added the use of a clicker or verbal marker to their protocols. It can be taught without the use of any marker, but I like having the clear feedback that a marker provides.