

Training Tip Tuesday: Leave it!

Leave it has come up a lot this week, so let's review how to teach it. My leave it cue is very specific; I want my dog to not only leave something alone; but to actually look away from it and completely ignore it. Having a good 'leave it!' cue is hugely beneficial for your dog. Dropped medications on a kitchen floor, unknown substances on sidewalks, or just plain disgusting things on a trail; being able to ask your dog to 'leave it' is more than just a useful cue – it could save your dog's life!

To that end; we never let our dogs get something we have asked them to leave. If you are practicing with treats on the ground; make sure you pick them all up. You can feed them to your dog later; but they shouldn't get them from the ground where they were asked to leave them. Think of it this way; if you dropped a bottle of medication; you would want your dog to leave the pills alone. You wouldn't let them go eat them later!

You can also use your leave it cue to help your dog ignore certain environmental situations; a dog barking at them that has piqued their interest, for example. If you have a fool-proof leave it, the cue will prompt your pup to turn their attention elsewhere and avoid a confrontation.

Step 1:

Get yourself set up with some high value treats and some low value treats. I like to work on eye level with the dog which means I'm usually on the floor.

- * Put a few high value treats in one hand, and a few low value treats in the other.
- * Keep both hands in a closed fist
- * Present your hands to your dog; the low value slightly ahead of the high value
- * When he shows some interest in the low value hand, say "Leave it!" and wiggle the other hand a little to draw his attention
- * As soon as he shifts his attention; open the high value hand and reward him!
- * You can click or mark him turning his head away to reinforce that he's making the right choice.
- * Practice this repeatedly; altering which hand you ask him to leave, and which hand you reward from.
- * Never give him the treat you have asked him to leave
- * You can increase the difficulty by making the high value hand less obvious.
- * When you say "leave it!", and he immediately turns his head away; you're ready to move on
- * If you can't get your dog to shift his attention – Move the high value hand around a bit; bring it closer to your dog to entice him. Help him less and less each time to encourage him to figure it out.

Step 2:

We've introduced the cue, and the idea that the dog should respond by turning his head away; now we start fading out the help and asking the dog to make a decision.

- * With your dog on a leash, toss a low value treat just out of reach
- * Prevent your dog from actually getting it
- * When the dog is focused on the treat, say "Leave it!"

- * When he turns his head back to you – praise and reward!
- * If he continues to stare at the treat, make some silly sounds and encourage him to look; but don't use his name, or give another command
- * Practice this until you can get an immediate response with your cue

Gradually increase the value of the item you are asking your dog to leave, and how far away he is from you. Proof it by asking for a good leave it off-leash!

<https://youtu.be/HP2FCp3MPY0>