

Golden Rule Training

Teaching Your Dog to "Leave It"

The objective is to have your dog leave an identified object alone when giving the cue, "Leave It"; for example, you drop food on the kitchen floor and your dog flies into grab it, but before he can you say, "leave it" and it stops him in his tracks. This is also helpful while on a walk and your dog sees a cat he wants to chase, garbage on the ground or other things he wants to pick up with his mouth!

First, have a default, or natural behavior your dog will offer without asking, such as a "sit". Test for a default behavior by standing in front of your dog with a treat in your hand without saying anything and wait to see what he offers you. He will try to think, "How am I going to get that treat?" He may have to think about it, but eventually he will try a few things to see what he can do to get the treat.

If you are working with a puppy or a dog lacking focus, work on the Doggie Zen Exercise below before starting the "Leave it" exercises.

We will use the Click/Treat (C/T) method for these exercises.

Exercise One

Part 1

1. **Put a treat under your shoe.** Do not say anything to the dog; wait for the dog to try to get the treat. You can use a clicker or just say, "Yes" and the treat; if using the clicker, Click and Treat (C/T) when he is not trying to get under your shoe.
2. **The dog gets food by leaving the treat alone.** The dog should offer a different behavior, such as a "sit", or he looks away, or up at you, or maybe he backs up from your shoe; any of those behaviors are good and all would get the "yes" and a treat or the click and treat (C/T).
3. Practice this part until you feel he has it down.
4. Next, attempt to put a treat next to your shoe, and quickly start feeding the dog quickly while he remains in place (in his "sit" or standing near you). The

goal is to get the dog to see food the food by your shoe, but he leaves it alone. The goal is for him to take food from your hand and not the floor.

5. Keep feeding and if he moves toward the treat on the floor by your shoe, cover it with your foot (it is easier to pivot over the treat than picking your foot up to cover the treat). This reinforces the idea "just because you see something, does not mean you can have it"!
6. The second he disengages from your shoe, Click/Treat (C/T); we want him to give a default behavior ("sit") and look at you. The treat should come from your hand, always.

Part 2 - Raising the Criteria

1. From approximately 6 inches off the floor, drop a treat next to your shoe. C/T any appropriate behavior (click and reward the behavior you want, which is not taking any food from the floor).
2. **Increase the difficulty** by dropping the treat from a higher level.

Then try throwing the treat farther away from your shoe. Here are some ideas:

- a. Place the treat on the floor near your foot.
 - b. Place the treat a few more inches away from your foot.
 - c. Drop a treat from increasing heights.
 - d. Throw treats, increasing the distance.
3. When he is comfortable, make it harder by throwing food a distance from your shoe while your dog offers a "sit." Now you can add the cue, "Leave it" and "Good boy!"

NEVER release your dog to take food/treats from the floor. If he does this on his own, move fast and cover it with your shoe!

Part 3

The next phase raises the criteria again, so here are some ideas:

Let the dog to run around (you may have to get him going by playing with him) and then leave a toy or treat on the ground. Try it near your shoe, then a little farther away each time he is successful. This is much harder because he will be in an

excited state. Tell him to "Leave It." This will proof how well he has learned the cue. If he takes the treat from the ground, back up to the step before and practice a little longer, he is just not ready for this step!

Doggie Zen Exercise

This exercise is a pre-cursor for puppies and/ or the easily distracted; start with the Doggie Zen Game as an introduction to "Leave It." We need the dog to get used to reorienting back to you automatically, so we add this environmental cue.

You may have to start with food, but you may want to switch to a toy to get his attention.

- Hold a treat or a toy up so the puppy can see it, wait for him to stop looking at the toy/treat and looks at you.
- If the pup does not understand the game, try rewarding him for even an eye shift toward you. Smaller steps can help the learning process. Say, "Yes" and give a treat or use the C/T for any turns back to you or any eye contact.
- If he is having trouble breaking his stare from the food or the toy, hide it behind your back so he cannot see it. You can also move the toy/treat as if you are making it dance to get his attention.

The Goal: is to have the puppy see the treat or toy as a cue to look at you! Once you have achieved this, then go to step one of "Leave It"

This exercise is based on Leslie Mc Devitt's book, *Controlled Unleashed*

Exercise Two

For this exercise, you will need a handful of treats and lots of patience. Cut-up hot dogs work well as treats, as well as freeze-dried liver, and cubed chicken or cheese. Use small, pea-sized smelly/yummy treats!

In order to teach your dog "leave it", you also need teach him "take it". If we only taught one part of the equation, the dog would think you are teasing him. You will hide the treats behind your back and not allow the dog to see them.

The steps:

1. Start with a treat in your hand and make a fist.
2. With your hand closed, show your dog your closed fist. Put it right up to his nose to get his attention.
3. He will probably paw at your hand; lick you, and maybe even whine. This is where you need to be patient and keep your hand closed.
4. Say, "Leave it, Leave it, Leave it" as he slobbers all over your hand; keep your hand steady.
5. Wait for him to step back, look away from your hand in another direction or make eye contact with you. This could take a while. Be patient!
6. The second he backs off open your hand flat with the treat and say, "Take it", then say "Good boy!"
 - a. Do not jerk or move your hand back, keep it in the same place as he takes the treat.

He will start to understand the difference between the cues.

Repeat the exercise of "Leave it, Take it" six times in a session.

Next Steps

When the exercise is reliable and he is getting it right 8 out of 10 times, you can continue the exercise with advanced variations. Be careful not to tease your dog with this lesson. Always have that reward ready for the times he gets it right. Special treats are great, but he also needs to hear you are pleased with him, so praise him!

Start by putting a treat on a table or chair. If your dog already knows not to jump on the furniture, you should find this next part very easy. If your dog tries to get the treat off the table or chair, tell him to "leave it!" and give him a different treat from your hand when he leaves it alone. *This reinforces his behavior and tells him that this is what you want, always say, "Good" when he gets it right.*

If he does not follow the command, refresh his memory with the "Leave it" and "Take it" exercise above. You can add a correction by saying, "eh-eh" as a no, to tell the dog that is not what you want.

Never move on to a more difficult part of an exercise until he masters the basics, we always want to make them successful every step of the way!

Sources:

www.aspcabehavior.org

www.loveyourdog.com

www.petmd.com

Leslie McDevitt, Controlled Unleashed