

Watch Me

Getting your dog's attention off what it's focused on and back on you is the first step to stopping unwanted barking. The purpose of the "watch me" exercise is to teach your dog to focus on you, on cue.

When a dog begins training it usually has no attention span and can become distracted at the worst possible times. When a dog becomes distracted in public, owners often lose control as the dog lunges and barks at the approaching dog, person, etc. Not only is this embarrassing for the owner, it can cause fear in the approaching dog or person and creates behavioural habits that can escalate into aggression. Punishing the dog creates an unpleasant association with the handler and the approaching dog or person making the problem worse. Teaching impulse control and alternative behaviour is a great way to prevent and solve this problem. Focus, concentration and self-control must be taught and strengthened as you would strengthen any muscle in weight training. If you can't get your dog's attention, you can't teach it anything, nor can you ask it to do something it's already been taught. Teaching your dog to watch you on cue is taking a big step toward being able to control your dog in public.

Procedure

1. Hold a treat in front of your dog's nose allowing it to sniff the treat.
2. Move the treat from the dog's nose to your eyes.
3. The moments your dog's eyes connect with yours give your "YES" reward marker and reward your dog with a treat.



Greg shows Sahara a treat then lures her focus to his eyes

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4. Feel free to crouch in front of your dog and hold onto its collar at the beginning if it's very small, young or jumping around excitedly.
5. When your dog makes eye contact with you every time you move the treat from its nose to your eyes add the "watch me" cue before moving the treat.
6. When your dog makes eye contact every time you give the "watch me" cue, require your dog to hold the eye contact for the count of two before saying, "YES" and giving the treat.
7. When you're successful with the count of two, require your dog to hold eye contact for the count of four, then six, eight etc. gradually increasing its focus and ability to concentrate.
8. Take this exercise on the road by asking your dog to "watch me" at different locations along your walk, beginning with short eye contact when there are no distractions and gradually increasing the length of contact and intensity of distraction as your dog is successful.

Note

- If your dog breaks eye contact when you expand the length of time, shorten your time requirement to ensure success. When your dog is successful with your last goal, you can once again ask for more.
- Remember to give your dog a play break after a maximum of three repetitions.
- The body movement of luring your hand toward your eyes will eventually become your hand-signal for "watch me."
- When asking your dog to do anything when distracted, begin with mild distractions at a distance then gradually increase the intensity by shortening your distance or increasing the volume. If your dog is unable to focus on you, the intensity of the distraction is too high. When this occurs, go back to your last point of success and proceed more slowly. Let your dog tell you by its success when it's ready to take the next step.

References

Dr. Ian Dunbar, Basic Training Video Series, TVS Television, 1992
International Animal Studies Obedience Training Course 1994