

Taking Treats Roughly

Dogs that are food motivated can be over-exuberant when taking treats and a treat of high value or the presence of another dog can increase its motivation to grab the treat quickly. Add a hard mouth to this scenario and you can have a very painful experience. To address the issue of a hard mouth see the *“Biting & Bite Inhibition”* handout.

Dogs use their mouths the way children use their hands, to investigate, play and eat. Like children with their hands, they’re not thinking about what their mouths are doing. In order to create a gentle mouth we have to teach the dog to think about what its mouth is doing and choose to control itself by moving its mouth slowly and gently. As soon as the dog realizes this is the only way to get what it wants it makes the correct choice.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to teach your dog to remove itself from whatever it’s focused on.

Dogs use their mouths the way children use their hands, to investigate, explore and play. They use their mouths without intentional thought. A dog that’s aware of what its mouth is doing is less likely to bite someone, has better bite inhibition and is less likely to bite hard if it feels the need to defend itself.

This cue can be used when the dog is pestering the children, sniffing around your food, chasing the cat, eating garbage on your walk, etc. This is a cue we commonly use when dealing with reactive and aggressive dogs, to instruct the aggressor to ignore the dog or person it’s reacting to.

Procedure

1. Crouch in front of your dog with a treat in your hand. Hold the treat in a closed fist right in front of your dog’s nose with the palm of your hand facing the dog.
2. Hold the treat steady and ignore everything your dog does until it removes its nose from your hand. Do not use your “leave it” cue until instructed to do so.
3. The moment your dog removes its nose, turn your hand over and open it allowing your dog to take the treat from the palm of your hand.

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4. After a few repetitions, your dog will target your hand and immediately pull back realizing this is the only behaviour that works to get the treat. As soon as this realization occurs you can add the “leave it” cue as you present the treat in your closed fist.

You’ll notice your dog becoming gentler and more controlled as it takes the treat from the palm of your hand.

“Leave It” Cue



1. Harley sniffs the treat



2. Harley removes his nose



3. Margaret Ann rewards him with a treat



4. “Leave it” - Harley learns that “leave it” means to remove his nose to earn the treat

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Note

- Open your hand immediately when your dog removes its nose, whether it's sniffing the floor to see if you dropped the treat or is distracted by something. Correct timing is important for your dog to learn that pulling back from your hand is the way to earn the treat.
- The reward marker is not necessary for this exercise because the timing of your reward is already perfect if you open your hand the moment the dog removes its nose.

References

International Animal Studies Obedience Training Course 1994

Dr. Ian Dunbar, Seminar notes Puppy Training 1990

Jean Donaldson, The Culture Clash 1996

Dr. Ian Dunbar, How To Teach A New Dog Old Tricks, James & Kenneth Publishers 1991