

Leave It & Take It

Teaching Leave It

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 yet.
3. The moment your dog removes its nose say, "take it" as you open your hand allowing your dog to take the treat.
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 your dog realizes pulling back gets the treat 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.

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.

"Leave It" Cue



1. Harley sniffs the treat



2. Harley removes his nose

Teaching Take It

Once your dog understands "leave it," require it to wait for the count of two before rewarding it with "take it." When your dog is controlling itself for the count of two, increase the length of time by a couple more seconds each time.

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As you achieve success, gradually increase the length of time until your dog is waiting for one minute before earning the treat. At this point you'll mix up the length of time your dog needs to wait so that it cannot predict when the treat is coming.

“Take It” Cue



3. “Take it” - Margaret Ann rewards Harley with a treat



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

Although Dr. Ian Dunbar recommends using a treat to entice your dog to let go of you when it bites and latches onto your hand, many dogs will quickly realize that biting you results in treats. If at any time your pup refuses to let go of you, quickly remove your hand from its mouth and leave the room at once.

I'm constantly sticking my hand in the puppy's mouths in my training classes and I do this to test their bite inhibition. If a pup is biting too hard it's important to increase the bite inhibition exercises to prevent long-term problems. These exercises should continue throughout a dog's life to ensure superior control and prevent the bites from becoming harder as it ages.

During my early studies I was taught that you should never rough house with a dog but I disagree. As long as you follow Rules for Games, playing with your dog will increase your dog's self-control and your control over the dog. However, if you play without rules you could be headed for trouble.

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