

Leave-It Instructions

Preparation: Hold 1-3 treats in one hand (this will be your “leave it” hand that you will present to the dog). Your hand should be closed in a fist or with a treat between your fingers where your dog can’t get at it.

Hold a hand full of treats in other hand broken into tiny pieces (this will be the hand you will deliver your reward from – hold it behind your back until you reward)

Training Step 1:

- Present “Leave It” hand to your dog without saying anything, simply allow the dog to lick and nibble at your hand (your hand will be closed so the dog can’t get the treat). NOTE: If you find that your dog is biting your hand too hard to easily do this exercise, you can wear gloves, but you should also ask us for help teaching your dog how to inhibit their bite.
- Wait for any moment where the dog does anything other than go for the treat (pauses, looks away, sniffs the ground etc).
- At that moment, say “Leave It” and reward with a single treat from the hand behind your back. Note: The reason we say “Leave It” at this particular time is to simply begin creating a word association between the act of moving away from the treat & the phrase “leave it.”
- Repeat until you are ready for step 2. You are ready to move on when you present the “leave it” hand and the dog doesn’t seem to want to go for it anymore, or looks to your reward hand behind your back for a treat. Depending on the individual dog and distractions around, this can take from 12-50 repetitions.

Training Step 2: The main difference in step two is that you will now present your hand and say “Leave It” at the same time (rather than waiting to say it until the dog ignores it).

- If your dog doesn’t go for it, Reward!
- If your dog does go for it, say “Ah, Ah!” and immediately remove your leave it hand and do not give a reward. Try again. If the dog is struggling, go back to step 1.

Progression: Eventually, you will want to use this command for everyday items that your dog may try to chew on, eat, chase or pay too much attention too (socks, furniture, garbage, your meals, squirrels, other dogs etc.). In order to get to that point, we need to make sure that your dog has a thorough understanding of the command, even when they could easily get the object they want. You will want to start with stationary items such as socks, garbage, food etc, and once your dog is reliable with that, you may move on to things that move such as people, dogs, squirrels etc.

As your dog begins to understand, you continue to up the criteria. Examples would be: Present Open Hand (close and remove if they go for it), Lower open hand toward ground or closer to dog, Work on duration (explained below), Place open hand on the ground, Place treats on ground with hand over treats (if dog is persistent in trying to get at treats, pick them up and take a step back), Standing up and placing treats on ground (since it is difficult to get down with your hand, you can use your foot to cover the treat if your dog goes for it), Standing up and tossing treats on ground, Walking by treats with dog (be prepared to quickly get on top of the treats or have leash control), Calling dog from a sit to pass by “leave it” treats.

A note on duration: It is important that your dog learns that “leave it” is not temporary, it is long term. For this reason, you will need to practice leaving treats on the ground for longer periods of time. Reward your dog for acting like the treat doesn’t exist (looking away, playing with you, anything other than looking at or going for the treat). At this point in time, we are not going to reward the dog for going for treat and being told “leave it” again, we will just say “Ah, Ah!” if the dog goes for the treat and be sure he can’t get the treat (hand or foot covering it). If we only reward the dog for going for the treat, then leaving it, we will accidentally pattern train our dogs to go for it, leave it, go for it, leave it, repeat, repeat. Instead we want “leave it” said once to mean pretend like that doesn’t exist. For that reason, we want to reward the dog for “doing nothing” or acting as if the treat isn’t even there.

Transferring to other items: Once your dog is reliable with a treat on the ground, you may begin transferring the command to other items such as garbage, chewing inappropriate items etc. Start with stationary objects, eventually working toward moving objects such as people, squirrels, other dogs etc.

Weaning Treats: It is important that your dog understands this command very well before we start taking the reward out of the picture. You can certainly reward less often as they improve, but consider this concept. If someone continuously told you to not eat your favorite meal that sits out on the counter every day, but didn’t reward you every once in a while with something else to eat, eventually, you might not see a reason to continue leaving it anymore, and may try to eat it. Once your dog understands the command well, continue to reward them here and there to encourage them to continue following the rules. Remember that any time your dog gets the leave it treat (or other leave it item), you are losing progress you have made. Guard the leave it item very closely!