

Teaching 'leave'

Teaching 'leave' gives you the ability to ask your dog to move away from something they are interested in! It helps develop your dog's self-control, which is incredibly useful in many other areas of their life. Once taught, saying "leave" will result in your dog turning away from whatever they are interested in and focusing on you instead, because you will have taught them that the word "leave" means they are getting a reward from you! The quicker they respond the better! You won't need to shout "leave" or panic because your dog will see it as a very positive and rewarding thing to be told to leave anything!



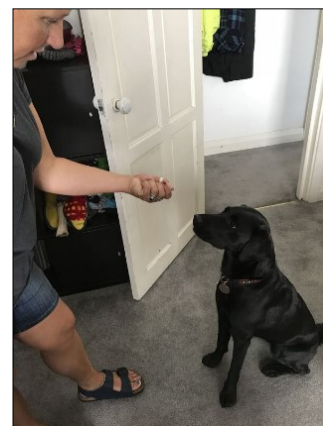
How to teach your dog to 'leave' something they want!

You'll need some different type of treats – including something like dry biscuits that your dog would enjoy but wouldn't be their absolute favourite (low value treats), and then something that they would really love and prefer over the dry biscuit treats, such as sausage or cheese (high value treats).

🐾 Have your dog in front of you. Hold one hand with a low value treat out in front of you but high over your dog's head, and the other with a high value treat hidden behind your back, or safely in a treat pouch/pot. Your dog should be showing some interest in the low value food in your presented hand but not be too excited. If they are struggling and seem desperate to get at the low value treat you can close your fist and/or raise your hand higher to begin with.



- 🐾 Simply stand still and quietly wait until your dog looks away from the hand containing the low value treat. If they scrabble at your hand, or lick you just keep your hand still and stay calm and quiet – they need to learn that this behaviour will not work in them getting the treat and that only backing away will make a treat appear! As soon as they look away reward them with the high value treat, which you should immediately present from its hiding place.
- 🐾 Repeat this step several times. Once your dog is getting the hang of it and learning to look away from the low value treat in your hand as soon as you present it, you can introduce the word "leave". Say 'leave' as you present your hand with the low value treat in, and then reward your dog when they look away from it – as they realise that they are not going to be able to have it.



- ✿ The next stage is to gradually lower the hand with the low value treat nearer to your dog's nose. Once your dog has the concept and can ignore a low value treat presented in a hand close to their nose you can increase the difficulty by having the treats on the floor – which is more like real life, for example if they discover food dropped in the street!
- ✿ The exercise now becomes slightly different, so we are going to go back a few steps and make it nice and easy for our dogs to get right! Have your dog on lead and place the item you would like them to leave on the floor some distance away – so that they cannot reach it. It's easiest to use a helper to place the item (low value food to start off with) at a long distance away from you initially. If your dog is scrabbling on the floor, barking or not able to focus on you then the treat is too close!
- ✿ Once you've found the right distance, at which your dog can still concentrate, wait for them to voluntarily look back to you, at which point you can say "leave" and reward them. Once your dog has got the hang of it you can gradually move closer to the food on the floor, until your dog can 'leave it' even when they are very close! At any point, if your dog does not voluntarily look back to you within a few seconds, calmly move away, increasing your distance from the treat and start again from there.
- ✿ Progress from low value food to other items that might tempt your dog, such as toys/shoes etc. Gradually increasing the value of the item you are asking your dog to 'leave' will help to strengthen the behaviour. Practise setting up training sessions in the house and garden by first 'planting' things you would like to ask your dog to leave, and then walking them past and rewarding them for leaving them! Doing this on-lead will help them get it right!

If your dog guards food or objects, or appears to be frustrated when trying to learn this and can't concentrate without jumping up, mouthing you or barking, then do not attempt this exercise and seek the help of a qualified professional.

Top Training tip

***Make sure that the reward is much or MORE FUN than what your dog is leaving!
For example, if you have asked them to leave a ball lying on the floor, reward them
by throwing a ball in the other direction!***

These resources have been created by Dogs Trust using the most up-to-date scientific-based understanding of dog behaviour and welfare needs and can be freely downloaded by anyone interested in learning more about understanding dog behaviour and training dogs.