

Leave It

The 'leave it' cue teaches your dog an invaluable lesson in impulse control that can be useful in many situations. The 'it' in question might be food that has fallen on the floor, something your dog picks up on a walk, another dog, or even a child. This cue teaches your dog to take his nose away from something but not to release something from his mouth. If you want your dog to drop something, the “drop it” cue should be given.

STAGE ONE:

1. Hold a piece of food in your closed hand so that your dog does not have easy access to it. Also, place a food reward in your other hand and hide it behind your back.
2. Extend the food toward your dog's nose and let him work out how he is going to get it out of your hand.
3. Your dog may try smelling, nibbling, or pawing at the treat, but don't give it to him. Keep your hand in the same position in front of your dog. We want him to back away, not the other way around.
4. Once he hesitates momentarily, either by stopping and moving his nose back or by turning his head away, immediately mark it with a click or “yess” and give him a treat from the other hand.
5. Repeat this exercise a couple of times until your dog consistently makes the decision to take his nose away from the food.
6. Now add the words 'leave it' when you go to offer the hand with the treat. This will build up an association between the cue and the action. Repeat this process a number of times.

STAGE TWO:

1. Put the food on your open palm so that he can see and smell it.
2. Show your dog the food in your open palm and ask him to 'leave it.' At this stage it may be harder for your dog to do because now he can actually see the treat right in front of him.
3. If he tries to get it, cup your hand over the treat and say 'uh-uh' as you do this.
4. If your dog does leave it, do not reward him with the treat from the hand that you have asked him to leave. Give him the food reward that you are holding in your other hand.

Up the ante by making it even harder for your dog.

1. Put the food on the floor and repeat the process.

STAGE THREE:

1. Put a leash on your dog and walk him past the treat on the floor.
2. If he reaches for it, say 'leave it' without jerking the leash, and praise and reward him if he leaves it. If he grabs the treat, don't try to get it out of his mouth. Go back to the previous stage where he was successful and build up the cue until he is ready to try again.