

Leave It

What does the behavior look like?

When cued, the dog will turn his head and move his body away from an object of interest.

Why should we learn it?

Leave it is used when you want to indicate that a particular person, animal or object is off limits to your dog. Don't investigate it, don't look at it and might as well not think about it either.

Training:

Treat in Hand:

1. Kneel on the floor in front of your dog. Make sure that he is free and not in a sit or down behavior.
2. Have several treats in your right hand and open your hand. Don't directly offer the treats to the dog, but open your hand. Your dog should come over to investigate.
3. As your dog approaches, say the verbal cue "Leave It" and close your hand. Don't allow him access to the treat.
4. He will try various approaches to getting the treat, perhaps including pawing at your hand, licking, or lying down. Ignore these without repeating the cue.
5. When he offers the behavior of looking at you (looking away from the open hand), mark the behavior. (Please review our **Marker & Release Cues** handout.)
6. Reward him from your left hand, but position your hand so that he has to move away from your right hand to get the reward.
7. Repeat a couple of times. You should see him start to offer the behavior of looking away from the right hand more quickly each time.
8. Reverse hands and repeat the whole process.
9. Once you have gone through an open right hand and an open left hand version, start switching off between the right and left hands randomly. Note: the reward is always delivered from the non-"Leave It" hand.



Treat on Floor:

1. With the handler standing and the dog in front of you, offer a treat to the dog, and let him have it. Do not ask for a "Sit"; dog should be free of any particular behavior.
2. Put a bowl of some tidbits behind you - so that you are between the dog and the food.
3. When he tries to go around you, say "Leave It" and step right in his way. He'll try to go around; you always stay between him and the food.
4. When he offers the behavior of looking at you (looking away from the item on the floor), mark the behavior.
5. Move away from the leave it item (bowl on the ground, in this case) and deliver the reward from your hand.



6. Repeat the process using the same bowl on the ground.
7. Move the bowl and repeat the process.
8. Note that you are not using a leash to pull the dog away from the item, and the dog should leave the item until you release him from the behavior.

Advanced Training and Applications:

Out in the World

Start to generalize the behaviors to challenging locations.

1. Set up scenarios in your yard (front and back) or on your walks by placing an object in a known (by the handler) location before your walk. Ensure that the object you are asking him to disregard is less interesting than your reward.
2. As soon as your dog first notices the object that you don't want him to investigate, give the "Leave It" cue.
3. If/when he tries to go around you, step right in his way. He'll try to go around; you always stay between him and the item.
4. When he offers the behavior of looking at you (looking away from the item), mark the behavior.
5. Move away from the leave it item and deliver the reward from your hand. The reward can be food or it can be a play session. (Please review our **Play: Tug & Retrieving Games** handout.)
6. Repeat the process using different locations and gradually escalating the value of the leave it item.
7. Note that you are not using a leash to pull the dog away from the item, and the dog should leave the item until you release him from the behavior.

Dog on Leash

This application assumes that the dog has experience with the "Leave It" cue.

1. Set up scenarios in your yard (front and back) or on your walks by placing an object in a known (by the handler) location before your training session. Ensure that the object you are asking him to disregard is less interesting than your reward.
2. As soon as your dog first notices an item you don't want him to investigate, give the "Leave It" cue and come to a stop without jerking on your dog's leash. Ensure that there is a reasonable distance between your dog and the object. Note: reasonable distance will be different for each dog/object combination.
3. If he turns his head and looks away from the object, mark the behavior and move away from the object to deliver his reward. Well done!
4. If he continues to put tension on the leash and stares at the object, wait for a moment and observe the dog. Avoid pulling the dog away with the leash; rather prevent him from moving forward by remaining stopped. When your dog realizes that this behavior isn't working, he might offer the behavior of looking away (looking at you).
5. If he turns his head and looks away from the object, mark the behavior and move away from the object to deliver his reward. Your dog learned something from the experience!
6. If he is too locked onto the object you may need to distract him, move further away and try again or you can step in front of your dog as described in the above method.
7. When he finally offers the behavior of looking at you (looking away from the item), mark the behavior.

8. Move away from the leave it item and deliver reward from your hand. The reward can be food or it can be a play session.
9. Repeat the process using different locations and gradually escalating the value of the leave it item.

Troubleshooting:

My dog is so focused on the object that I can't "body block" him and he never turns his head away:

- Your dog may be too close to the object you want him to leave. Move further away and try again. You may need to distract him with an interim behavior if he is a particularly focused dog.
- The object may be too much higher in value to your dog than what you are using as a reward. Ensure that your reward is truly motivating to your dog.
- You gave the cue too late for your dog's level of training. Give the cue as soon as your dog notices the item.

My dog grabs the reward and then races back to the leave it item:

- Your dog may not have a good understanding of the concept of a "release" cue. (Please review our **Marker & Release Cues** handout.) Whenever you give a "Leave It" cue and you remain in the proximity of the item, remember to use your release cue. Don't let your dog decide when it is time for him to take the item.
- Reward might be delivered too close to the original item. When you deliver the reward, always move away from the item. Not only does this create a pattern for the dog - look away and move away - but it also sets up a training loop for another round with the same object.

My dog doesn't seem to understand the cue:

- Handler might have missed marking the requested behavior. In the beginning, mark and reward any look away from the object.
- Handler's marker timing might be late.
- Dog might have a history of rewarding himself. You may want to work with a **Behavior & Training** instructor to undo some of the incorrectly learned behaviors.
- Go back to the beginning with training the cue.

Training Resources:

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org.

Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.

