

Teaching a Dog: Leave It

This is to be used when your dog is about to get something that they should not have. Some examples of when you may want to use this cue are when your dog is about to eat your food off of your plate, or when they are about to grab a shoe. You want your dog to turn their nose away from the item you are telling them to leave.

Phase 1: To begin, you will need some tasty treats, and the use of both hands (Image 1). One hand will hold the “bait” and the other will hold the reward –it does not matter if the treats are the same or not.

1. Have the tasty reward hidden behind your back, and in the other hand have the “bait”. Pretend the bait is a diamond ring –you do not want your dog getting ahold of something so valuable!
2. Hold the bait out to your dog's nose in a closed fist -let your dog smell your hand, but do not let them have what's inside (Image 2). They will try to get at the bait by licking and pawing at your hand -just ignore this.
3. As soon as they stop, even for a second, say “Yes!” and reward with the treat that was hidden behind your back (Image 3).
4. Repeat this, swapping hands, until your dog is barely trying to get the bait. Now you can start adding the verbal cue “leave it”.

Hold the bait out to your dog → let them try to get it → when you think they are about to give up say “Leave it” → as soon as they give up, say “Yes!” and reward!



Image 1: Use two treats- one as 'bait' and one as the reward.



Image 2: Hold the treat out to your dog in a closed fist.



Image 3: As soon as your dog ignores the bait, remove your hand and offer the other treat!

Remember, you do not want your dog eating something so valuable to you, so pay attention during these training sessions! If your dog is able to sniff your fist with the bait, then pull their nose away when you say “leave it” 10 times in a row, you are ready for the next phase.

Phase 2: Repeat steps 1-3, but this time keep your hand open so the bait is resting on your open palm –it will be much harder for your dog to resist a treat when they are looking at it.

If your dog is about to grab the bait, simply close your fist and ask them to leave it. If your dog is reaching for the treat on your palm, but can stop themselves when you say leave it, then you are doing great!

The next step is to start to lower your hand towards the ground a few inches. The bait should still be on your open palm. If your dog can pull their nose away from it when you say leave it, lower your hand a few more inches and repeat. Keep doing this until the back of your hand is touching the floor –remember, you can still close your fist if your dog is too tempted and tries to go for the bait! This is getting your dog used to leaving items that are on the floor.

With the back of your hand touching the floor, and the bait resting on your palm, wait for your dog to make a move towards it. Say leave it as they reach for the bait –if they don’t listen, just close your fist and wait for them to listen. If they listen right away, make sure you reward them with the treat hidden behind your back! If they can do this 10 times in a row, you are ready for the next phase.

Phase 3: To keep building on this, you can now have the bait on the floor while you are standing upright. Keep a foot hovering nearby the bait, so if your dog can’t resist and goes for it, you can gently cover it with your foot.

Once you can stand upright with the bait on the floor, and your dog can turn their nose away from it, you can make it more challenging by adding in movement.

While standing in front of your dog, gently drop the bait to the floor near the side of your foot –the bait should fall at least a foot, so the dog has a chance to see the movement. As soon as your dog starts to move towards the bait, ask them to leave it. If they do, give them a reward while you pick up the bait. If they don’t listen, simply step over the bait with your foot and try again when they are ready. If your dog does well with this, you can drop the bait from slightly higher up, and keep gradually increasing the height/speed at which the bait falls, as each time it will be slightly more challenging for your dog.

Continue building up your dog’s skills in small steps, gradually introducing more distracting situations or items that you want them to ignore something. This cue is great when out on walks if your dog becomes very interested in other animals they see, but you have to practice practice practice before you can expect them to perfect it in a real life scenario!