



PAWS[®] CHICAGO

TRAINING PROTOCOLS | Leave it & Drop it

Leave it

The cue “leave it” is used when we want the dog to leave something or someone alone. It could be an item left on a table, a plastic wrapper, a child’s toy, or dropped food item. On a walk, the cue “leave it” can be used when we want the dog to turn away from and ignore something or someone. It is particularly useful cue for dogs who are reactive or over excited by people, dogs or wildlife, such as squirrels and rabbits.

TEACHING LEAVE IT/PART 1

We recommend that you have knowledge and practice of clicker training before teaching “Leave it” and “Drop it”. However, the marker word “yes” can be substituted for the click. ***See Clicker Training Protocol.**

Step 1

Teach the dog to respond to the cue “watch”. ***See Clicker Training Protocol.** This can be done while teaching the following steps in a separate session. You will need the “watch” cue when you get to Step 4.

Step 2

Take a treat and put it in your closed fist. Have more treats ready in your pocket or bait bag. Say “leave it” and put your fist in front of the dog’s nose to sniff. Wait it out if the dog bothers the fist by nudging, bumping or licking. When the dog finally gives up and stops bothering the fist, click or say “yes”, open your hand and say, “take it”.

Step 3

Continue to repeat Step 2 until your dog completely leaves your fist alone when you give the cue “leave it.” Meanwhile, continue to practice the “watch” cue to incorporate in the next step.

Step 4

Give the cue “leave it” and present the treat in your closed fist. At this point the dog should know to leave it alone. Immediately give the cue “watch”. Click or say “yes” and say “take it” as the dog makes eye contact with you (start with just a split second of eye contact).

Step 5

Practice Step 4 until the dog starts to immediately make eye contact when you say “leave it” (your goal is to drop the cue “watch” and have the dog automatically give eye contact on the “leave it” cue).

Step 6

Give the “leave it” cue and present your fist. Slowly open your fist and let the dog see the treat on your hand. If the dog goes to snatch it, quickly close your hand. Wait until the dog leaves the treat alone on your open hand, then click or say “yes” and then, say “take it.” Repeat until the dog no longer tries to take the treat.

Step 7

Repeat Step 6 and add the “watch” cue while your hand is open. Click or say “yes” and say “take it” as the dog makes eye contact.

Leave it

TEACHING LEAVE IT/PART 2

When the dog is fluent with the steps in Part 1, you are ready to move on. Part 2 involves removing the “take it” cue and teaching the dog reinforcement comes from turning away from the object, person, or dog that it is asked to leave alone.

Step 1

Start with treats in your bait bag or pocket and the dog on a leash. Take up the slack in the leash, give the cue “leave it” and drop a treat on the ground outside of the dog’s reach. If the dog tries to get to the treat, stop it with the leash. **It is very important that the dog does not get the treat.** Wait until the dog stops trying to get to the treat and there is slack in the leash. Click or say “yes” and deliver a treat **from your bait bag or pocket.** If the dog tries again to reach the treat, repeat the cue “leave it” and wait for the dog to stop pulling towards the treat. Click or say “yes” and treat the dog from your bait bag or pocket. Pick the treat on the floor up at the end of the exercise so the dog doesn’t get it.

Step 2

Practice Step 1 until the dog no longer tries to get to the treat on the floor with a loose leash. Now, start asking the dog to “watch” before the click or “yes” and treat.

Step 3

After the dog can look away from the treat on the floor on the “watch” cue, begin teaching the dog to change direction and move away. Start the exercise by entering the room where a treat is already on the floor. Stop a few feet from the treat and when the dog starts to show interest, say “leave it”, turn to the right and walk briskly in the other direction. Click or say “yes” and reinforce the dog when it moves with you, ignoring the treat on the floor.

Step 4

Start to generalize the exercise by placing different objects, toys or food items on the floor before entering the room. Repeat Step 3 and practice until the dog can easily ignore the item when given the “leave it” cue and follow as you move away.

Step 5

Practice outside on a walk. When the dog spots something or someone that is off limits, give the “leave it” cue and turn in the other direction. Always reinforce the dog for moving away and following you.

Drop it

To prevent conflict or resource guarding issues over objects, it is a good idea to teach a dog the cue “drop it,” by trading up for a reward or another item of equal or higher value. This cue can be used when the dog picks up something that is off-limits or can cause potential harm, such as a chicken bone, food wrapper, or personal item. “Drop it” can also be used during play. It is more fun if the dog will drop a ball while playing retrieve games or the rope during tug-of-war.

Step 1

Start with an object that the dog does not highly value such as a toy or bone that has lost intense value. Use treats that the dog considers favorites such as cut cheese, hot dogs or chicken.

Step 2

Ask the dog you relinquish the item by saying “Drop it” and present a treat close to the dog’s mouth. Immediately reward and praise when it drops the item, then give the item back to the dog after it finishes the treat.

Step 3

Practice this exercise again and with other items the dog has, but doesn’t put too high his list of valuables, until it understands it is rewarding to give up resources.

Step 4

If the dog enjoys playing ball or tug-of-war, incorporate the “Drop it” cue into the game. For ball games, have two identical balls (this is important because sometimes a dog will hold onto a preferred ball). Throw the first ball and when the dog returns, hold up the second ball and give the cue “Drop it”. When the dog releases the ball, throw the second ball. Soon the dog will learn that dropping the ball will keep the fun game going.

Tug-Of-War Tips

1. Have a pouch or bait bag filled with treats and the dog’s favorite tug toy.
2. Engage the dog in a game of tug and then stop moving completely.
3. Reach in the bait bag and hold a treat in front of the dog’s mouth and give the cue “Drop It.”
4. Immediately praise and reward the dog when it drops the toy, then engage the dog again in the game.
5. Repeat this several times and then try to do it without the treat, but immediately engaging the dog in the game after it releases the toy.
*If the dog refuses to drop the tug toy, simply turn and walk away from the game.
6. At the end of the game, give the “Drop it” cue and a small jackpot of treats when taking the toy.