



Leave It Without the Leave It Exercise

“Errorless leave it” – Credit: Sarah Owings

The Goal: Eye Contact/ Attention on the cue of food smell, or sight of food in your hand or pouch – equally relaxed even with kneeling or sitting closer.

Purpose of exercise: Teaching your dog that you holding food is a cue to offer base position (Sit/Down/Stand), it also teaches how to wait for a click or verbal marker (“Yes”) before focusing on food in the hand. The presence of food cues offering their attention to you in a calm manner then receiving the food after the click or verbal marker (“Yes”). Strengthening default behavior to look to handler when in the presence of food.

When to mark the behavior? Any time there is brief eye contact, head tilting towards you, eye movement towards you or holding eye contact.

Who benefits from this exercise? This is a great exercise for dogs who have a difficult time focusing and are over aroused around food. Dogs who default to frustrated behaviors when they see food.

Foundational Skills: Stimulus control- waiting for cues, calming behavior in the presence of any reinforcement.

What you will need: Towel/Snuffle Mat/Slow Feeding Bowl, Treats, Clicker (Optional)





Step by Step

1. Get your set up started before introducing your dog to the area. This way when your dog is in front of you, you are ready to start the exercise.

The step up: You can kneel or have a low chair, treats in both hands, the bowl/snuffle mat directly in front of you

2. When your dog enters the area, put some treats in your bowl or snuffle mat to begin. Sit or kneel and have treats in your hands behind your back.
3. When your dog is done eating the treats, they should lift their head towards you, mark and reward with a click or verbal marker ("Yes"). Then immediately put another piece of food on the mat or bowl.
4. Continue this process every time your dog lifts their head towards you, alternating which hand puts food on the floor each repetition. Your dog should eventually offer eye contact for a longer duration.
5. Once eye contact is more reliable and happening more readily as well as body is relaxed and no signs of frustration, you can bring your hands forward with fists of cookies at your side then eventually on your lap.

Having Trouble?

1. Make sure to be patient and take baby steps when advancing to the next step. If you advance before your dog is ready, you will be setting your dog up to fail.

If your dog is showing signs of frustration, you may be extending your duration too long. You can restart by scattering food on the floor as a reset.

2. If your dog is encroaching on your space, nudging, or trying to get the food in your hands.
 - Do not move your hand and avoid any verbal corrections like "No, ah ah."
 - Closed hand = look to you
 - When dog offers even the slightest bit of eye contact, mark, and reward. If you need to go back to the very beginning of hands behind your back, that is okay!

