

Petpros Behavior Services

Basic Training

Lesson Four

Drop It, Leave It, and Let's Go!

Drop It

Having a good drop it command not only makes playing fetch or tug easier, but can also save his life when he picks up something by the side of the road that could make him very sick if he eats it. Obviously, in order to drop a roadside prize, this needs to be a cue your dog has practiced a lot and eagerly complies with using his toys. If your dog "guards" or gets growly over certain objects, DO NOT use this practice. Instead, have a desensitization program designed for you by the trainer to help eliminate this dangerous behavior. If your dog doesn't growl, but enjoys making you chase him around the house to retrieve something from him, practice the following:

- 1) While your dog has a toy, approach him with a treat in your hand. Say "Drop it" or "Out" or whatever cue word you would like, then bring your hand with the treat up to his nose. When he drops the toy to take the treat, click or praise and release the treat to him. Repeat this until he's spitting the toy out every time he sees your hand coming.
- 2) Next move your hand towards his face, but without the treat in it. When he spits the toy out, click or praise and get a treat from another place to get him.
- 3) Continue to move your hand towards him when you give the cue with no treat and eventually shape it where your hand coming towards him is just a way for you to catch the toy when he spits it out. (If it's a dead squirrel you're after, move your hand towards him as a cue, but you don't have to catch the squirrel, obviously. Yuck!)
- 4) Eventually only reward occasional, perhaps more difficult drops with a treat. For example, the reward for dropping it in a game of fetch is that he gets the toy thrown again. Do randomly give him a treat even during fetch, though. The occasional random treat makes behaviors VERY solid. It's like playing the slot machine. He never knows when a "payoff" might come.

Leave It

This cue basically means “Whatever you are looking at, headed towards, or about to ingest, leave it alone and back off”. We teach this through three games that will help her understand the meaning (would be great if we could explain it to them, wouldn't it?)

- 1) First, take a treat and put it on the ground, covering it with your hand. Your dog will try to move your hand, but you won't budge. Tell her “Leave it” and keep it covered. If she is really digging at it hard, you might have to cover it with your shoe instead.
- 2) The split SECOND she backs off to try to figure out what's happening, click and pick up the treat and give it to her from your hand (it's probably best if they never think picking things up off the floor is a great idea).
- 3) She should start backing off more and more quickly when you say “Leave it” until eventually she doesn't go for it at all. At this point (with your hand close and ready) leave the treat uncovered for a second or two, telling her to “leave it”. If she doesn't budge, click and give it to her, plus a couple more. That was worth a jackpot!
- 4) You are now ready for the next game. Put your dog on leash and have her sit next to you. Show her a treat and say “leave it” then toss it farther than the leash will reach in front of you. She will likely dash after it, but the leash won't let her get to it. When she finally gives up and stops paying attention to it, give a different treat from your pocket. Never let her have the treat that is on the ground. It symbolizes the dead squirrel mentioned previously.
- 5) Eventually, she will stay by your side when you toss it and won't go after it at all. Jackpot!
- 6) Finally, with your dog on leash, you will put a large treat on the ground and walk her past, making sure the leash is too short for her to reach it as you walk her past. When she sees it and starts heading towards it, say “leave it” and when she returns her attention to you, give her a treat from your pocket.
- 7) Hopefully, with these three exercises, she has figured out that “leave it” means “pull your snout back from wherever it's headed”. Practice these games now and then to keep it fresh in her mind for the day you DO run into that dead squirrel on your walk.

Let's Go!

Basically, this cue means "walk with me without pulling". Your dog can walk in front of you and out to the side as long as he's not pulling or tangling you up on the leash. This is different from the formal "heel" where your dog will walk right next to you and sit automatically when you stop. That is a good command for walking through a crowd, but wouldn't be so good for a bathroom walk or a chance to sniff and explore a bit.

- 1) Start with your dog standing or sitting next to you. Say "let's go" in a happy voice and start walking. Before your dog has a chance to pull, click and treat while the leash is still loose. Do this another time or two
- 2) Say let's go again and walk a little farther. Give him a chance to tighten the leash. When the leash is tight, stop. Don't budge. Be a tree.
- 3) When he gets confused and comes back to you, loosening the leash, click and continue the walk. A treat might not even be necessary dogs love their walks so much.
- 4) At first you won't get far on your walks. You'll be stopping a lot, but he will eventually learn if he wants to keep moving, he needs to back down when he feels the leash begin to tighten or the whole parade will stop until he loosens it. It can definitely make for some boring walks at first, but it will be worth it when you are no longer being dragged down the street!