



How to teach your dog to ....

## The Leave Exercise

The "Leave" exercise is used to stop your dog from doing something or touching something that it shouldn't. It's a "don't touch it" situation. It may be food, the neighbours cat, another dog that is too close, a dead animal they find on a walk, something dangerous etc that you want your dog to stay away from. I am sure everyone has told their dogs to leave it or don't touch it or come away. Instead of all those words - make it ONE word - Leave! (One word commands are quicker and more effective and understood better by our dogs).

To teach the exercise it will help if you have two people but you can teach it on your own. Have the dog on leash - check chain is preferable because the snap and release will really re-inforce this exercise. With the dog sitting at heel beside you and the lead loose, have the other person hold some food close enough to tempt the dog (or put some put on the floor in front of the dog). If the dog moves forward to the food, give a snap (and release) on the lead and tell them "Leave" and as soon as the dog pulls back, give immediate praise (but don't give a food reward as we are using food to teach the exercise). The dog should remain sitting in the heel position. Repeat this a few times always with the snap, release and praise. If the dog tries to use a paw to grab for the food, the same applies - snap and "Leave" - then praise. Once the dog breaks eye contact with the food, then release them from the exercise, lots of praise and then reward with the food.

It's good to have a "release" word - to give them the signal that it's now ok. You might use "Free" or "Okay". Don't teach them that the exercise is finished when you praise them as this could undo things in the middle. When they "leave" whatever it is on command, you want to be able to praise them for the initial obedience, you don't want them to think I've done this now I can do what I want. Make the release word something specific that isn't going to come out of your mouth casually. In some cases you might want to call them to you, if they are near something harmful, then praise and release.

This exercise has so many applications. It will teach your dog not to steal food, whether from a plate or out of a child's hand. The last thing you want is a dog snatching for food from a child. It's good to sit your dog and tell them to leave while you are putting their food plates out - that can prevent a stampede especially if there is more than one dog and keep mealtimes settled and civil. I live in an area with dangerous toads that are everywhere in summer. A reliable "Leave" can be invaluable to literally save a dog's life.

I use the word "reliable" a lot when explaining these exercises. We must practice these exercises over and over - daily, weekly, monthly, yearly. Even when a dog knows and understands an exercise and can perform it easily, you still need to train and practice to re-inforce that knowledge. With an exercise like "Leave" where you want instant results, you don't want your dog to be slow to react because they have forgotten or because they are thinking about defying you.

Remember prevention is always the best option. If you see something you don't want your dog near, get them under control by putting them on leash or moving away from the area. Our dogs might be obedient but the other dog, or snake, or toad, or child, might not be.