

Leave-It

Purpose:

The **Leave-It** exercise teaches your dog to ignore an item. **Leave-It** means do not walk towards an item to sniff it or pick it up.

Leave-It can be used in the following examples.

- When you set your sandwich on the coffee table while you go to the kitchen for a drink
- When your dog is interested in bones on the ground
- When your dog wants to chase a cat
- When someone walks by with food in their hand

The **Leave-It** signal is used

- When you are leaving the room for only a minute or two
- When you can remove the item from your dog's presence
- When you can take your dog away from the item

It is not appropriate to use a **Leave-It**

- With a steak thawing on a counter while you go out of the house for several hours
- With the kitchen trash can while you are gone at work all day

Verbal Signal: Yes

Non-Verbal Signal: No

Steps for Teaching Leave-It:

Step 1 – You will need two types of food rewards. One treat should be a high value, delicious treat your dog really likes. The other treat should be a low value item like a dry dog biscuit similar to a Milk Bone.

Put the low value dog biscuit in your hand and close your hand around the biscuit. Offer this hand to your dog. When your dog smells, licks or tries to get the food, move your hand up and away from your dog. Do not say anything.

Continue to offer your hand with the low value item to your dog until your dog does not move toward your hand. When your dog does not move toward your hand, **Click. Treat** with the high value delicious food reward.

Training Tip

Click when the hand with the low value food is in front of your dog and she is not moving toward that hand. Do not click when your hand is up and away from your dog. You are training your dog not to go toward an item that is in front of her.

Leave-It continued

Step 2 – Once your dog consistently does not move towards your hand with the low value food item, you are ready to add the signal. Examples of good verbal signals are Leave-It, Never Mind, or Ignore. Bring your hand down. If your dog is ignoring the item, say “Leave-it”. Use a neutral, normal tone of voice when you say “Leave-it”. Your dog is already doing the behavior so there is no need to sound threatening.

Pair the signal with the behavior several times. Then see if your dog understands the signal. Put your hand with the item in front of your dog and then give the signal “Leave-it”. Your dog should not move towards your hand. If she does, repeat Step 2 a few more times.

Step 3 – Now present the low value food item with your hand open. Since your dog understands the signal, say “Leave-it” at the same time you are putting your hand down. Repeat several times until your dog does not move towards your open hand and the behavior is strong.

Step 4 – The next level is to move your hand closer to the floor. Tell your dog to “Leave-it” and put your hand a little lower than your dog’s nose.

Click/Treat when your dog does not move toward the item in your hand. Say “Leave-it” each time you put your hand down and for each repetition put your hand a little closer to the floor.

Click then **Treat** your dog with the high value, delicious food reward. Your dog is learning when she does a **Leave-It** she will get something better than what she ignored.

Training Tip

If you are not successful at a certain level, return to the previous level and practice there for a few repetitions. When your dog is successful, then move on to the next step in training.

Step 5 – When your dog is consistently leaving the item, you are ready to put the item on the floor. At first, do not put the item too close to your dog. Say “Leave-It” as you place the item on the floor. If your dog does not go towards the item, **Click**, pick up the item from the floor, and then **Treat** with the high value food.

Training Tip

When you first put the item on the floor, keep your hand nearby so you can cover or scoop the item away if your dog moves toward it. Before this, the item has always been in your hand. Now that the item is on the floor, your dog might think it is okay to take it. After a few training sessions, your dog will learn not to go towards the item when given the **Leave-It** signal regardless of where the item might be.

Leave-It continued

Step 6 – Once your dog consistently ignores on signal an item that is placed on the floor, begin dropping the item. At first, drop the item from just a couple inches above the floor. After a few successes, gradually drop the item from higher distances.

As you drop the item, say “Leave-It”. **Click** when your dog does not go toward it. Remove the item. **Treat** with the high value food reward.

Savvy Helpful Hint

If you are training on a leash, do not pull your dog away from the leave-it item. This will not teach your dog to ignore an item on signal. Your dog should be performing the behavior on her own. Then when she is off leash, she will respond to the **Leave-It** signal.

Step 7 – Once your dog has learned the above steps, practice **Leave-It** with different items such as tissues, shoes, more interesting food items, clothes, children’s toys, or other things you may want your dog to leave.

Practice the **Leave-It** outside with the items you have trained with inside. Also, practice the **Leave-It** while you are taking your dog for a walk. Use the signal when your dog goes for an old bone, trash, or a cat.

Training Tip

Inside your home put several items on the floor. With your dog on a leash, walk by these items. Tell your dog to “Leave-It” as you walk by the item. The first time you practice this, make sure you are far enough away from the item so that your dog cannot reach them. If your dog is straining on the leash, do not pull her away. Wait for the leash to get loose or for your dog to look at you. Then **Click/Treat** and reward your dog with an extra special treat.

Your dog is learning to make a choice. When she chooses to ignore the items, the reward needs to be extra special.