

# Attention Fix: Using the Auto-Check-In to Help Your Dog Focus around Distractions

Does your dog lose all focus on you in a training class? Does she forget you exist when you go to the dog park? Is she more interested in meeting other dogs or other people than in paying attention to you? Spend a few minutes each day for a week to build a solid foundation of attention.

If you take the time to do these exercises you will greatly improve your dog's ability to focus on you and respond to your commands in a class situation or other distractions, including being around other dogs. (This assumes you are using reward marker training and understand how to mark and reward attention). These exercises are designed to do in a week's time. If you can't do it every day, try to do it at least 4-5 times in a week.

## Day One

- Find a non-distracting environment - your home kitchen or living room (not the dog park or classroom!). Watch your dog's eyes. Whenever your dog looks at you, click or say your marker word, and give your dog a treat. Don't do anything special to get your dog's attention - just wait for it and capture it. Do 10 reps of this 8-10 times throughout the day.
- Now play "The Eye Contact Game": hold some treats in your hand and hold your hand out to one side. Don't say anything to get your dog's attention; just wait patiently while your dog stares at the treats to tries to get them (just hold your hand closed). The moment the dog tears his eyes off of the hand with the treats and looks at your face instead, click and treat!

By the end of this day, you should have marked and rewarded your dog for looking at you one hundred times or more!

## Day Two

- 5-10 times throughout the day: Do one minute of "catching your dog in the act" of looking at you. See how many reps you can get in a minute. After each "look" set the treat on the ground so that your dog will look away and have to look back at you to get the treat.

## Day Three

- Go to a place that is interesting and potential distracting for your dog - a dog park or a pet store for example. Do **NOT** go in! Move away from where the interesting action is - far enough that the dog is no longer entirely focused on the action. Stop some distance away - up to a block away - and wait. Wait for your dog to look at you. When she does, mark it, treat it, and celebrate! Is she still looking at you? Mark and treat it again. Do your one-minute round of rewarding eye-contact.

- Why are you waiting and not trying to get the dog's attention? Because you want the dog to be able to look at you on her own, without you having to do all the work up front. Patience will pay off!
- For safety's sake, and for control, your dog should be on leash. But your goal is to get the dog to look at you even when there is no leash, so try not to use the leash to get her attention.

#### Day Four

- Go back to your exciting place and go to the distance you were successful at before. Do one minute of rewarding attention. Are you rewarding as many sequences of the dog looking at you and you clicking and treating as you could at home with fewer distractions around? If so, move a few feet closer to the interesting action, and do another minute of rewards.
- Move around, but stay at the new distance for the training session. If your dog is glued to you, practice other things such as sits, downs, turn and goes, etc.
- If another dog or other distracting thing comes too close to you for your dog to ignore, either wait until it's past again and the dog turns her attention back to you, or move a few feet away, backwards.

#### Day Five through Seven

- Repeat the exercises from day four until you can be reasonably close to the distraction and your dog will notice but then orient to you.
- Again, calmly move away from distractions if they get too overwhelming.

#### What Next?

- Repeat day three through seven in a new location until she is great at that location.
- Then try another location. Keep going until you can go to a new place and your dog is able to focus on you right away. This will usually take three to five new locations.