

LEAVE IT

Why teach your puppy leave it?

The leave-it command is great for calling your puppy away from things not intended for him, like appetizers set out on your coffee table or a baby's toys or diaper, or things that are downright dangerous, like chicken bones left on the street or in the trash.

How to train it.

Warm-up.

Step 1. Place a treat in a closed fist. When your puppy shows interest in your hand, hold it still. Don't move your hand away.

Step 2. As soon as your puppy pulls away or loses interest, click or give your marker word, then treat from your other hand. Use a treat as good as or better than the one you asked your puppy to leave alone. Once you can predict that your pup will back away, you can say "leave it", just before you put your hand out.

Table exercise.

Step 1. Place treats on a dining table, coffee table, or counter. Stay within arm's length so you can cover up the treats if needed. You can place them on a plate to imitate real life.

Step 2. When your puppy shows interest tell him, "Leave it." If he looks away or hesitates, click or use your marker word and reward him with a separate treat. If he goes for the food, say, "Ah-ah" (a No Reward Mark) and cover up the food. When he stops trying to get at it, mark and reward.

The reward treat should not come from the pile on the table, and should either be the same type of treat or something better.

Step 3. When you get a 100% success rate with 10 trials (your puppy never tries to go for the treats on the table), add distance between yourself and the table. Ask someone to help protect the food if needed or have your puppy on a leash to stop him from getting at the food if he tries.

Floor or ground exercise.

Step 1. Repeat the above exercise, but with the food on the ground. You can also use trash with a food smell or something else you want your puppy to be able to leave alone.

Step 2. Next, put food or trash on the ground and practice leave it while you and your puppy walk by. Begin by passing at a good-sized distance and work your way closer and closer to the enticing object as your puppy gets better at the exercise.

You can do this with anything you see on the ground. When your puppy notices the object, tell him, "Leave it" and reward any response of looking toward you. Just be sure to stay far enough away for your puppy to be unable to reach the object.

Training Tip: The sooner you give the command, the better. If your puppy is already intrigued by an object, it is much harder for him to leave it alone.