



Teaching Your Dog to Pay Attention

Building focus means getting our dogs to pay attention. This is useful for when we need to communicate with our dogs and want them to focus on us, regardless of whatever else is happening at the time. The most important thing to remember is that it takes time to build focus. Be consistent and reward good choices, but most importantly have fun!

Teaching your dog to respond to their name

- 🐾 Have small, tasty treats ready. Say your dog's name and when they look at you, roll or throw a treat out to the side for them to chase and eat.
- 🐾 As soon as they finish the treat, roll a treat out to the other side of you.
- 🐾 If your dog doesn't respond when you say their name, try only one more time. If they still don't respond, then move further away from them before trying again. If you keep saying their name over and over, they may simply learn to ignore it!

Teaching your dog to give you attention

Response to marker word

Once they are responding well to their name, you can then introduce a marker word. This is whatever comes naturally to you when praising your dog, like 'yes', 'good boy' or 'good girl'.

We introduce this word so that when we are training our dog and they do a nice behaviour that we like, we want them to look at us so we can give them a reward. With enough practice, you should notice that if they do something good and you say their marker word, they should look at you, expecting a treat or other reward.

- 🐾 On walks, simply watch your dog. Whenever they look at you, reward them with a treat for 'checking in' with you.
- 🐾 When your dog is on lead and becomes distracted by something, stand still to prevent them getting to it and calmly wait. When your dog glances in your direction, reward them with a treat.
- 🐾 It's likely that your dog will go straight back towards the distraction, so remain still and wait until they glance at you again. Immediately reward them while moving away from whatever it was that distracted them. Continue until they are able to remain focused on you.
- 🐾 If it is safe and reasonable to do so, you can now give your dog permission to interact with the distraction (e.g. sniffing a tree or saying hello to a friend). This teaches your dog that it's worth checking in with you first in these situations, because they get a treat and then permission to get involved!

Top training tip

If your dog struggles, move away from the distraction and try again at a greater distance. Practise so your dog learns to look to you automatically whenever they see something distracting!



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The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice.

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