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## **Leave It (foundation exercise)**

Leave-It is an impulse control behavior. Use it any time you want to communicate to your dog: “don’t act on your impulse to go for (fill in the blank).” This can be other dogs, cats, squirrels, enticing smells that they’re dragging you towards (the reward can be the opportunity to smell!), chicken bones or any other dangerous thing on the ground, etc. Before using it, however, we have to ascribe meaning to the cue. Here are the steps to build a solid Leave-It.

1. Put a tasty treat into your closed hand – your dog will lick, nibble and worry at your hand. Just wait – and wait – until he stops harassing your hand. As soon as he does, say “Good!” and feed him from your other hand. Practice until he doesn’t lick or worry at your hand any more. Don’t say the word yet!!
2. Put a tasty treat into your open hand and say “leave it.” He will try to eat the treat – close your hand when he does so he can’t get it. Wait until he stops bugging your hand for the treat, then say “leave it” and re-open your hand. Repeat until he doesn’t try to take the treat when you open your hand – then reward him with a treat from your other hand.
3. Next, say “Leave It”, take a piece of food and place it on the floor about 2 feet away from your dog. He will likely go for it, so be ready to cover it! When he hesitates for one second, reward him with the treat. Increase duration as he is successful.
4. Next, say “Leave It”, and casually toss a piece of food on the floor. He will likely go for it, so be ready to cover it! When he hesitates for one second, reward him with the treat. Increase duration as he is successful.
5. Plant a pile of high-value food or a toy on the ground, in between a start and end position that you designate. From the start position, walk your dog passed the temptation. When he notices it, say “Leave It!” and continue moving forward. Reward him for moving away from the distraction.

## **Leave It (Food on the Table I)**

1. Plant a pile of high-value food or a toy on the counter, in between a start and end position that you designate. From the start position, walk your dog (on leash) passed the temptation. When he notices it, say “Leave It!” and continue moving forward. Reward him for moving away from the distraction.
2. Next, arm yourself with a supply of treats, but make them discreet. At first, your dog will follow you around, keen to the rewards. Ignore him, so that he gives up on the notion that the rewards are predictive of any treats going her way. This is what we want – a forgotten secret reward stash.

3. Set a few food items on a surface that the dog has stolen from or that you would like to be thoroughly trained to be off-limits.
4. Station yourself somewhere nearby, and look as natural as you can (begin to wash dishes, etc.)
5. If the dog makes a move toward the food, say “Leave It.” If he does not go for it, praise him and reward him from your secret stash. If he continues to go toward it, say “too bad” and give him a time-out.
6. Stake him out again for a couple of minutes. If he doesn’t go for it again, praise him and reward him with several treats. This is important! We want him to learn that ignoring the forbidden items is even better than trying for one. We don’t want him to learn, “Oh I see. The way to get rewarded is to make a play for the food on the counter to get her to cue me to ‘Leave It.’ I can do that!”

### **Leave It (Food on the Table II)**

1. Arm yourself with a supply of concealed treats. This is very important! We don’t want the dog only obeying when she thinks it is likely that she’ll get a treat, so it pays off to be discreet.
2. This time, set a few food items on the kitchen counter or other surface within your dog’s reach **when your dog is not looking**. This part is also very important! We are trying to simulate a natural scenario in which your dog would be likely to steal food: He discovers that something enticing is sitting on the counter, and you are not in “training mode,” i.e. standing next to him with a hand full of treats.
3. Act as natural as possible until he notices the food, then say “Leave it” and reward him heavily.
4. Don’t forget to also reward him for ignoring the food once he is aware of it. This is the ultimate goal – leaving the food alone all together.
5. If he goes for the food at any point, immediately say, “Too Bad” and give him a brief timeout in a crate or other room for a minute or two. Then try again.
6. Repeat this every day until your dog doesn’t even try to go for the food any more.
7. Repeat parts I and II on all surfaces in your house you need proofed against food stealing.