



Look At That!

Adapted from Leslie McDevitt's book Control Unleashed.

If your dog barks and lunges at people, other dogs, bicycles, trucks, etc. while on-leash, the Look At That! game is a very effective way to address this problem behavior. The purpose of this exercise is to 1) build focus on you and 2) change the way your dog feels about his triggers.

It makes sense to teach the reactive dog to focus on his handler, rather than his trigger. But often, the way handlers go about doing this can create additional stress for the dog. If the dog is taught to sustain eye contact with you no matter what is going on around him, he has not learned to cope with his environment. Why not allow him to check out his environment, and then focus back on you? This is what Look at That! is all about.

To do this, we need to first teach the dog the game outside of the problem context (without his triggers present), and then gradually increase difficulty.

STEP 1 : Neutral Object Behind Back

- Hold a neutral object (such as a remote control, a stapler, a pair of scissors, a rope toy, etc.) in one hand and some treats in the other. Put both hands behind your back.
- Then bring the neutral object out from behind your back.
- When your dog looks at the object, click and feed him with his head near the center of your body.
- Put both hands behind your back and repeat this several times.
- Remember to feed back towards you so your dog learns to orient away from the object.

STEP 2: A Familiar Person

- Have a familiar person help with this exercise. With your dog on-leash, have the person duck behind a wall or door, and then “appear” in the dog’s line of sight.
- Click the dog for looking at the person and feed back towards the center of your body.
- If the dog is not orienting toward you when he hears the click, make a kissy sound after you click. If he still does not turn toward you, use a food lure to prompt him into the correct position.

STEP 3: A Dog

- Repeat the exercises in step 2 using a dog. It is advisable that you begin by using a bomb-proof dog (one who will not react to your dog no matter what).
- Click the dog for looking at the neutral dog and treat back towards you.
- If the dog does not look back at you use your voice, kissy sounds, a food lure, or take a few steps backwards to re-orient your dog.

- Practice this until your dog “beats you” to the click, meaning he looks at the other dog, then whips his head back toward you before you can even click.
- As he is successful, play Look at That! in more challenging environments, such as across the street from a dog park, or on your usual daily walk.

Tips:

- Always practice with your dog below threshold (meaning no barking and lunging). If he is, you’re too close, or the trigger is too intense. Adjust accordingly.
- If your dog will not turn back toward you after you click, resist the urge to click multiple times. Click once, then prompt him the following ways, if needed:
 - Make a kissy sound.
 - Call his name and happy-talk as you move backwards.
 - Lure him back toward you by placing the food right at his nose, and then using the lure as a “magnet” to turn his head back toward your body.
- Decrease distance from dogs very gradually.
- There is no verbal cue for this exercise. We simply wait for the dog to look at a trigger.
- Remember to keep your food hand behind your back so that your dog isn’t simply staring at the food. We want to teach him that his triggers are the best predictors of the food rewards – not your loaded hand.