



Pawsitive Experience
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The Attention Game

I tell my students that if they could only pick one skill to master with their dog it should be to get their attention. It is the foundation for all training that follows. When your dog hears her name, she should spin around and look at you to get her next instruction. It's probably the easiest training to do, and the most important.

Here's how to teach it:

Start this training with your dog on a leash. Wait for your dog to get distracted. When she is off sniffing the grass or looking at something of interest, say her name, and as soon as she turns her head, say "yes" or "good" (that is a marker that tells her she did it right), and reward her with a yummy treat. You then release her with the word "okay." This gives her permission to do her own thing. When she gets distracted again, repeat above. Have a pouch of treats on you and do this 20-30 times a day for a few weeks.

Building Duration: When your dog gets really good at this game slowly add duration before you give her the reward marker and treat. You can now add a "watch" and have her look at you for a few seconds, reward, release her with an "okay," and start again.

What do you do if she doesn't turn her head? The most important thing is to only say her name once. If you say it over and over, she is learning that she doesn't really need to pay attention until the third or fourth time you call her. Instead, you can clap your hands, or use high-pitched fun sounds or a squeaky toy to get her attention. You can put a treat to her nose and turn her to you. If she is on leash, you can back up and she will have to turn around. If she is not paying any attention at all, this means you are working in an area that has too many distractions. Move to a new, quieter area and try again.

Make it a fun game and use a lot of reinforcement so that you get your dog's undivided attention. You will see results after just one or two sessions, but keep at it. Practice makes perfect.

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