



Look at That

Introduction

“Look at That” is a useful exercise to help you and your puppy deal with distractions. It is not a verbal cue but is a way of conditioning our puppies to remain neutral and eventually check in with us whenever there is a distraction they find exciting nearby. We want to avoid having our puppies fixate on the distraction or become over-stimulated and bark or pull and lunge towards it. We are working towards your puppy checking in with you whenever they see a distraction, exciting or not!

How to Practice the “Look at That” Exercise

This exercise is a stationary activity, so it works best if you are staying in one spot rather than walking around. Start out in a low distraction environment, so your puppy’s attention is not pulled in 10 different directions! Sitting in your front or back yard during a quiet time of day is a great option. The aim of this exercise is to build a pattern of “Look at that, then look at me.” The more you are able to practice this, the quicker you’ll see results!

1. Any time your puppy notices a distraction, like a squirrel, a leaf blowing by, or another dog across the street, BUT DOES NOT REACT, say “Yes!” right away and reward. If they are reacting to the distraction (pulling, lunging, barking, etc), move further away from the distraction and give your puppy some time to refocus before you start the exercise.
2. As long as they are continuing to remain still and quiet while watching the distraction, continue to mark with a “Yes!” and reward every 3 to 5 seconds.
3. If your puppy is starting to get excited and you think they may start pulling, call their name and move further away from the distraction, then begin the exercise again.

4. If your puppy is sitting calmly and watching, you can wait to see if they turn to look at you on their own.

Initially it will feel a bit strange, because it feels like you are rewarding your puppy for doing nothing or that you are rewarding your puppy for staring at a distraction. What you are doing is rewarding your puppy for not interacting with the distraction and they will get used to you rewarding them when a distraction appears. Eventually, they will learn to automatically look at you when they see a distraction, and you will mark and reward that behavior.

Common Problems and How to Deal with Them

- 🐾 It's important to stay at a distance where your puppy can see the distraction, but not so close that they become over-stimulated and want to pull towards it. The more you practice this skill, the closer your puppy will be able to be to distractions without losing focus on you. If you try to move closer and your puppy starts pulling, that lets you know that your puppy needs more practice at a further distance.
- 🐾 If your puppy is staring intensely at the distraction but still taking treats, do not move closer to the distraction. You can continue at that distance threshold for a few minutes, then move your puppy farther away to give them a break.
- 🐾 If your puppy is staring intensely but NOT taking treats, move them farther away from the distraction. Continue the exercise at a distance where your puppy is able to take treats.

Other Useful Resources

Video – Look At That

Article – Puppy Emotional States & Thresholds