

7 Steps to Attention Training

The foundation of all puppy and dog obedience is “Eye Attention” or in other words teaching your puppy to pay attention to you. That is the most important skill to teach your puppy. Right now, you are your puppy’s everything so it’s simple to teach the eye game. However, later in his/her life, which is only a few weeks away as your pup’s confidence increases; it will become increasingly hard to gain and keep your pup’s attention when he/she learns there is a world outside of you. So teach the eye attention game now upon first getting your puppy or adult dog.

PURPOSE: To teach your dog to pay more attention to you. A dog that pays attention to you is less likely to miss obedience cues and is less likely to be distracted or afraid of it’s environment.

- 1 Stand straight up smiling at your dog with a tasty dog treat held in front of your face. When your dog looks up at your face, mark the desired behavior by saying “yes”, “good”, or push the button of a clicker. Then reward your dog with the tasty treat.
- 2 Do not put this exercise on cue by saying, “look at me”, “focus”, “watch”, etc. as you want your dog to eventually initiate this attention behavior. You shouldn’t have to remind your dog to pay attention to you. Instead, your dog should learn that offering this behavior results in positive things, whether that be treats, a ball, or praise.
- 3 After you have practiced the above step for one or two days, hold the treat slightly out to your side and wait for your dog to look back at you. He or she will look at the treat but eventually he/she will look back at you. When your dog looks back at your face, mark the behavior and reward him/her with the tasty treat.
- 4 If 60 seconds or more has gone by, say “nope” (saying nope instead of “no” makes it difficult for you to put negative intonation to the word as the dog is just confused and not being disobedient) and walk away from your dog. Your dog is likely to look at you and follow you due to your movement. When he/she does, mark the attentive behavior and reward.
- 5 At first, a simple quick glance at your face results in a verbal mark and reward. As your dog becomes more experienced at eye attention, expect a longer stare at your face before marking and rewarding the behavior.
- 6 As your dog becomes more proficient with longer stares trying changing the hand position of the distracting treat: A) held in the opposite hand out to the side, B) treats held in both hands that are held alongside your body in neutral positions so now your dog has to look past the hands instead of just away from your hands, C) treat is placed on a counter top so the food is off your person, etc.
- 7 As a last challenge, position yourself in front of a mirror or looking out a window at nighttime so you can see your dog’s reflection. Mark and reward your dog’s attentive behavior even though you are not looking directly at your dog.