

Teaching an Eye Contact Command



Teaching your dog to make eye contact with you on command can be very useful to get and keep your dogs' attention in situations that may be fear or anxiety provoking. It can also be a part of teaching your dog to literally and figuratively look to you for leadership.

To teach an eye contact command you need: training treats (pea sized morsels) and a quiet, distraction-free location (ie inside the house without other people or animals present).

1. Begin to teach the eye contact command by luring your dog to look at your eyes by holding a treat near his/her nose and then moving the treat up to your eyes. As soon as your dog makes eye contact (or looks at the treat near your eyes), say "good boy/girl" or another word you use to tell your dog he/she has done a good job, and then give him/her the treat by moving it in a straight line from your eyes to his/her mouth. Make sure to say your marker word (ie "good girl/boy") right when your dog looks at you. Timing is essential.
2. Next hold the treat out to your side or behind your back. Your dog does not know a command, so at the point don't say anything. Just wait for your dog to look at you. When she does say "good boy/girl" and give him/her the treat. If he/she doesn't make eye contact in 10-15 seconds go back to step 1.
3. After several repetitions, when your dog starts understand you want eye contact give the behavior (looking at you) a name or command, like "Look" or "Watch me". Say the command right before he/she looks. When he/she makes eye contact say "good boy/girl" and give him/her the treat.

4. As your dog gets better with the command you should begin to practice it inside with distractions (i.e. another person walking around the room, music on, etc.), then outside in a non-distracting location such as the backyard. At this point, you can begin to use the eye contact command to get your dog's attention on walks, both for practice and in "real situations". Remember to make sure your dog has successfully mastered 1 location before moving on to a more challenging location.