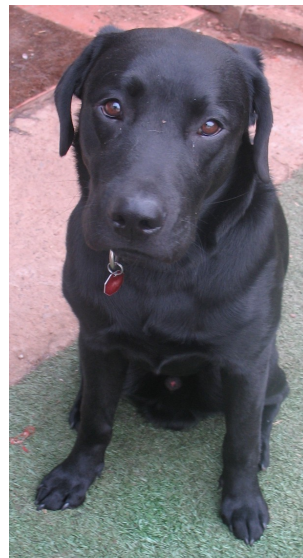




Getting your dog to pay attention

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A lot of dog owners are frustrated by a dog who doesn't seem to listen. When they try to engage with their dog it's as if the dog tunes them out. For these dogs and owners it's simply a matter of teaching the dog how to pay attention, and also that interacting with their owner is both fun and rewarding.

One way to start getting your dog's attention is to do some simple focus exercises with her, that teach her to make eye contact with you on request.

Start out training this in a quiet place, with few competing distractions, like your back yard. Have several small food treats, something your dog really enjoys, to reward him with. Take the first food treat and put it against your dog's nose. Quickly draw the treat up from your dog's nose to the outer corner of your eye. As the treat moves your dog should follow it with his eyes, so that when it gets to be next to your eye, he should be more or less looking at you. When your dog is looking at you say 'good dog' to let him know he's done the right thing and give him the treat. Repeat this several times.

Don't expect your dog to look at you for very long at first, your dog is just learning what you are asking of her. Just a second of eye contact in the beginning is plenty. You will see when your dog gets the idea as she will start making eye contact automatically, you can then increase the amount of time. Again, when asking your dog to look at you for longer, increase the time by just a few seconds at a time, asking too much too soon will set your dog up to fail and will make you both frustrated. Breaking training down into short easy steps makes your dog successful and helps keep her motivated and interested in the training process.

Once you have repeated the level one exercise a few times, about 5 to 10 times, your dog should be ready to move on to the next level. Here we stop luring the dog into the right position and start asking him to think and figure out what it is required. Skip the step of putting the treat on your dog's nose, instead put the treat in your hand and hold your arm out to the side. Your dog will probably follow the treat and look at your hand, wait, after a while your dog will look at you as if to say, 'Why aren't you giving me the treat?' The moment you get eye contact say 'good dog' and give him the treat. Again he will probably only look at you for a second or even half a second at first, this is fine, reward your dog for this and he will learn what you want. Once he has the idea, you can ask him for more.

After you have practiced this a few times with your dog and she is looking at you straight away, instead of looking at the treat, you can start adding in a command word like 'watch' or 'look at me'. Repeat the exercise a few times with your new command word.

Next, to test if your dog really gets the idea, try turning away from your dog and saying your command word. First turn sideways to your dog and if he gets this right then you can try turning your back on him completely and see if he will walk around you and 'find your face'. If your dog can do this correctly for a few tries in a row you can start making a game of it, run away from your dog and have him chase you to make eye contact or spin around in circles and keep him running. Now your dog has added the 'watch' exercise to his list of fun things to do it should be easy to get him to comply every time you ask. Make sure you keep up excited praise and food rewards to let your dog know you are pleased with him.

You are now ready to proof your training by trying out the new command in situations where there are more distractions, like when you have visitors around or on a walk.

Why teach your dog to look at you? If you don't have your dog's attention you can do nothing else with her. Once your dog is looking at you her focus is taken away from other dogs or people or smells that might distract her and you can start to work with her on whatever you would like to do next.

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