



## **Doggy Zen, Teaching Self-Control to Dogs**

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Doggy Zen is a fantastic exercise to teach any dog as it teaches dogs self-control around food. For most dogs this is one of their most exciting resources and self-control around food will translate into self-control in other areas.

Many problem behaviours, especially the impulsive behaviour of adolescent dogs, stem from the dog's lack of self-control, so teaching doggy Zen can help improve overall behaviour.

Pick a quiet spot to begin working with your dog at first. If you have more than one dog, begin by training them one at a time, after they have all learnt the exercise, then you can start training them together. Collect several food treats your clicker if you will be using this.

Put one treat in the palm of your hand, let your dog see you doing this, and then close your fist around the treat. Let your dog sniff at, paw at, nibble etc. your hand. Wait for your dog to back off by either turning her head, looking at you or anything else other than your hand, sitting, lying down or taking a step in another direction. It doesn't matter how your dog backs off, just that she stops trying to get the treat out of your hand. As soon as she does this click your clicker or say 'good dog', open your hand and allow her to have the treat.

At first, when your dog is just learning, you want to give him the treat as soon as he backs off so that he can be successful and learn what you want.

Once your dog is backing off immediately you put the treat in your fist, no more nose bumping, pawing etc., then you can start adding in your command e.g. 'leave it'. When you open your hand and allow the dog to take the treat you can add a command to let the dog know they can now have the treat e.g. 'take it'.

Little by little increase the time your dog has to wait before you give her the treat. Add just a few seconds at a time e.g. if she is doing three seconds well, then you might go up to five or six seconds. If at any stage your dog seems to lose interest, you may have increased the time to much, make it easier again, asking for less time, and build up more gradually.

Once your dog can wait for 30 seconds to get the treat, you are ready for the next level. Now hold the treat in your open hand and give the command 'leave it'. If he tries to grab the treat close your fist around it again and tell him 'uh uh'. Then try again.

Once your dog has mastered this level for 30 seconds try putting the treat on the floor. Put it a few hand lengths away from your dog's front paws so she would have to reach to grab it, and tell her 'leave it'. If she tries to grab the treat, cover it with your hand and try again.

After your dog can do this reliably then begin moving the treat closer and closer to his paws until you can place it in between your dog's paws and have him leave it.

The final step is to drop the treat onto the ground between your dog's paws. As the treat is moving, its really hard for your dog to resist grabbing it, so be ready to cover it quickly with your hand if you need to.

The secret of this exercise is in building up a decent amount of time, 30 seconds to a minute, at each level. The longer your dog can resist the treat, the better her self-control. While asking your dog to do this for fifteen minutes or an hour would probably be a bit cruel, (if you could get them to concentrate for that long!), a minute or so is quite impressive control.

You can also experiment with the value of the treats, e.g. dog food pellets would probably be a lot easier for most dogs to resist than liver treats or biltong. Start with the easy stuff and move up to the high value rewards.

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