



Golden Rule Dog Training

Come. Learn. Play

Focus Exercises

All dogs need to have focus, puppies, adolescents, older dogs, and dogs with all kinds of behavior issues can benefit. This is a great skill for your dog to have on walks for those are easily distracted. For example, if you are out on a walk and your dog sees another dog, or hears a motorcycle that scares him you can use this skill to help him cope and ignore the trigger by asking him to focus on you instead.

This is helpful when training a young dog, starting leash training as your dog encounters a distraction and you need to keep him from pulling.

The first step is to build a foundation. This means to start slow with no distractions and build up to more distractions in many locations. Every time you start in a new location, make sure to use the basic steps and slowly move to the more difficult (this may take a week or two).

Level 1.

1. Use the dog's name instead of "watch me" or "focus" and always use a calm voice (never harsh, never yelling).
2. Start with a distraction-free environment, such as inside your home. Then move to the backyard, then to the front yard. You can also practice while walking your dog. Remember not to advance too quickly; your dog may not be able to hold focus as there are too many other distractions. You want success so practice adding a little stimulus at a time.
3. Every time the dog looks at you, happily praise and give him a treat. If using a clicker, click and treat with eye contact.
4. Walk away from the dog, walk back and repeat.

Tip: If your dog is not looking at you put the treat under his nose, and then bring the treat near your face while saying his name, he should be looking at you!

Level 2.

1. With your dog close by, call your dog's name and let him see you are holding a treat in your hand.
2. He will look at you, and he should offer a "sit", as he focuses count to 5 silently as you SLOWLY lower the treat to your dog. He should be holding his focus on you. As he takes the treat for focusing, praise him!

3. Once he has mastered the 5 count start increasing it slowly up to 10.
4. Do as many as 5 repetitions at a time. Do this exercise in the morning and evening every day until you see a solid focus from your dog.
5. As you start to add small distractions you may need to up the treat value so holding focus trumps all other distractions.

Tip: If he jumps up to grab the treat, he does not get it! Say, “eh-eh” and the treat stays in your hand. Try again. Most dogs learn quickly that they must have all 4 paws on the floor to get the treat.

Note: This training is all positive reinforcement. It works well for dogs that are food motivated, which are most dogs. If there is little interest, try when he is hungry. Remember to praise with an upbeat tone for doing a good job.

As with all training, end the sessions on a positive note with your dog completing the cue correctly. By watching your dog you will be able to anticipate if he is losing interest. End the session BEFORE this happens; you want your dog to always be successful when learning so he is happy to participate.

This game is all about focus, but also includes a side benefit of impulse control!

Level 3.

This game requires a lot of patience!

Pick a toy that is only for this game. It will be used during training and when the training is done, the toy is put away.

1. With your dog sitting or standing in front of you hold the ball or toy away from your body, in your palm, and keep it still.

Your dog will probably focus on it, jump, bark and do just about anything to get you to throw or give him the toy. You must be patient and remain calm!

2. Standing completely still and focused on your dog, continue to wait until the second he looks up at you, NOW mark the behavior with a “Yes” or a click then the reward is to throw his toy.

Do not let him jump up to get it, if he does then say, “eh-eh” and turn your back, wait a few seconds and start again.

Continue playing this game and your dog will quickly learn to focus on you with eye contact. If you want to add a cue, you could start saying, the dog’s name + “focus” or “watch me” to the behavior.

Once successful ask your dog to focus in many different environments, do this slowly and do not start with asking for focus in a dog park! Make sure your dog is always

successful – if he can't hold the focus, then go back a step and start over (you are trying to progress to quickly).

You can increase the difficulty by:

- Ask him for focus from across the room.
- Extend the time that your dog stays in his focus behavior (count 3, then 5, then up to 10).
- Practice putting the toy closer to him while he is holding his focus. Continue to practice until he is successful.
- Add movement; move his toy up and down and keep his focus.
- When trying a new environment, go back to the first step to train the cue. Focusing outside with more distractions is difficult for most dogs. Dogs do not generalize, so starting from the beginning in a new environment is a must.

Keep practicing until you have a reliable focus.

Sources

<http://www.thedogtrainingsecret.com/blog/teaching-dog-drive-eye-contact-focus-leash-skills/#sthash.k9fPIYKp.dpuf>

<http://www.dogskool.com/attention.html#ixzz3XCrmICB3>