



Leave It and Take It

What is the picture of Leave It? *Don't mess with it, drop it, back off, not for you.*

What is the picture of Take It? *You can put whatever is in my hand in your mouth.*

This command is extremely useful when you want your dog to avoid going near something. You can use “Leave It” when something drops on the floor that you don’t want your dog to touch, when there is something gross on the ground outside like cat poop or a dead frog, and/or when you want your dog to back off and leave something or someone alone.

Step 1: To teach your “Leave It”, sit on the floor, place a treat in your fist, anchor your elbow on your leg, and present your closed fist approximately 3 feet away from your dog’s nose. Wait for your dog to pull his nose away from your fist and as soon as he does, mark the moment “Yes!”. Immediately, offer him the treat and say, “Take It”. You can either reward with a treat from your other hand behind your back, or if you use the same hand, make sure it is clear to your dog that it is okay to take it by moving your hand directly to your dog’s mouth.

“Take It” always comes from your hand. Never ever let your dog take the treat from off the floor! We do not ever want him to get the picture that he can take whatever you have asked him to leave, off the floor.

Continue this step until your dog shows any sign of avoidance. Watch your dog carefully as signs of avoidance are different for individual dogs. They can be very subtle, and can be missed if you’re not watching carefully. Typical signs can be looking away, looking up at you, moving their head away from your fist, backing up, or offering a Sit! Gradually begin to open your fist so the treat is visible to the dog. If at any time, he attempts to grab it, snap your fist shut and begin again.

NOTE: Anytime your dog looks you in the eye when practicing this exercise, immediately mark the moment, offer him the treat from your hand, and say, “Take It!”. We want him to learn to look to us for guidance and not stare at the treat.

Step 2: Now that your dog is beginning to get the picture, stay seated on the floor, place the treat on the floor, and cover it with your hand. Again, wait for your dog to back away or leave your hand alone in some way. The second he does, mark the moment, “Yes!” pick up the treat off the floor (or from your other hand behind your back), clearly move your hand to your dog’s mouth, and say, “Take It”.

Gradually begin to uncover the treat and wait a few seconds. The second you see avoidance, mark the moment, “Yes!” and pick up the treat off the floor (or from your other behind your back), clearly move your hand to your dog’s mouth, and say, “Take It”.

By this time, your dog should be easily leaving the item, thus indicating that he is at least 80% fluent in the behavior. Therefore, it is time to start adding the cue, “Leave It”.

Step 3: Change the picture by standing up and following the directions in Step 2. Use your foot to cover the treat and remember that “Take It” only comes from you hand, never from the floor. Set a goal to be able to stand up straight, leave the treat uncovered, and count “Good dog 1, good dog 2, good dog 3” while he continues to leave it.

For more advanced practice try these exercises:

- Train your dog to leave the treat on his paw, or both paws. For a super advanced trick, teach your dog to Leave It on his nose!
- Put your dog on a leash and hold the end of the leash in your hand. Say, “Leave It” as you toss a treat on the ground just out of reach of the leash. If your dog goes for it, he will pull to the end of the leash. Once he offers an avoidance behavior, resulting in a loose leash, mark the moment, offer him something delicious from your pocket, and say, “Take it!”.
- Put your dog in a Down position and place the treat in front of his paws. Slowly begin to add Distance, Duration, and Distractions. Set a goal to walk a complete circle around your dog while he continues to leave it.

Generalization:

- Take the show on the road and practice everywhere, especially outside, while you are walking your dog.
- Be sure to practice with all kinds of different treats and objects so your dog begins to generalize that “Leave It” means *anything* he is looking at, at that moment (e.g. a toy, a person, another dog, a frozen Kong, a sock, a dryer sheet, and steak on the counter, etc.) is off limits.