

Another method for teaching “Leave It”:

- 1) Count out several piles of treats, with ten treats in each pile. This will help you keep track of the repetitions you have done so you only need to count the mistakes. If it’s more than 2 per pile, repeat that step with a new pile of 10.
- 2) Place a desired object on the floor. How close the dog is to that object depends on how much he wants the item. The more desire there is, the further away the dog starts. You want the dog to remain in thinking mode and not go into “lizard brain” - focusing only on the desired item.
- 3) Once the proper distance is found, you will be a **post** SILENTLY holding the leash. You could also use a leash attached around (or to) your waist. You stand still, not pulling back on the leash, while the dog looks at, paws at or pulls toward the object. If the distance is correct, this will only happen briefly. If the dog is not stopping, you’re too close. Back up a bit and try again.
- 4) Be ready to click when the dog turns his head away from the object AND his body language indicates that he is “giving up on” the object (even if it’s only briefly.) When you see this and click, take a step or two away from the object as you get the dog’s reward (one of the 10 treats) and deliver it to the dog.
- 5) Build on this by gradually expecting the dog to look more in your direction until the dog is giving you eye contact instead of just turning his head away. This may take several repetitions of each expected level/distance of head turn in your direction, depending on the dog. You are still staying silent.
- 6) Now build on the duration of the eye contact – up to 5 seconds- building in 1 second increments (8 correct out of 10 reps before expecting an extra second) Yes, it’s a lot of reps, but that’s a good thing! You want the dog to think this is easy! And to practice lots of correct responses.
- 7) Repeat (moving the object a few feet to a new spot every few repetitions) until the dog gives you immediate eye contact when you reach that particular distance. Once this happens **8 out of 10 times**, then you can decrease the distance to the object. Make sure you do this at least 10 more times AFTER you think the dog understands it. It won’t hurt to practice correct responses that are now easy for the dog, but if you progress too fast because you *think* the dog understands what you want, you no longer have a strong foundation to build on. You are still staying silent.
- 8) When you are a leash length away and getting correct responses 8 out of 10 tries, then start to add a single step parallel to the object (as though you are going to walk past it.)
- 9) When the dog can maintain eye contact while you take that step for 8 out of 10 repetitions, then add a second step. (2 steps parallel to the object while expecting eye contact) Don’t forget to move the object around every few tries.
- 10) As the dog is performing correctly 8 out of 10 tries for the current number of steps, add another step and repeat the process.
- 11) When you have added enough steps that you are able to approach the object and walk all the way past it while the dog maintains eye contact, **NOW you are ready to add the cue.**
- 12) As you are approaching the desired object that the dog wants and knows is there, say leave it just before the dog gives you eye contact. You want the timing to be:
 - a. Dog looks at the object (might need someone to be moving it to get this step)
 - b. You say leave it as you start to walk toward the object
 - c. Dog gives you eye contact and maintains eye contact until you are past the object and tell him what a great dog he is.
 - d. Repeat multiple times.
- 13) Once you have reached this point, the dog has had many, many successful repetitions and clearly understands exactly what the cue “Leave It” means for that object. You should also be able to pass over top of the desired object without the dog attempting to get it and with only the briefest breaks in direct eye contact with you. Now you just need to practice these steps (starting at the beginning) in new places and with new objects.
- 14) Because your dog has had a long reward history, fully understands, without a doubt, what leave it means because you have practiced in many locations with many different objects, you should be able now to do this off leash. Just be sure to have someone ready to cover or remove the desired object on the first few passes, just in case. You want to practice correct responses and set the dog up for success! 😊