

Attention

Okay, folks! Now that you have your dog conditioned to the clicker (or bridge word) you are ready for the next step. (Miss that lesson? The Clicker)

Again, go to a room without a whole lot of distraction, one where your dog already finds you more than usually interesting (the kitchen is usually best!). Have your bowl of tasty treats ready.

Say your dog's name ONCE in an upbeat, happy voice. When he turns to look at you, C&T. Then let him get a bit distracted by something and do it again. And again! You are looking for: he hears his name, and turns to look at you (okay at this point if he is just looking at your hand)! Many dogs will also come closer to you which is fine but not required.

If when you first say his name he doesn't look, then reach forward & gently touch him on the side or something so he turns around. Even if he doesn't look right at you, C&T. He'll soon get the idea!

At first, hold the treats in your hand behind your back, but then progress to having them sitting on the counter. Looking at the bowl of treats gets him nowhere... he needs to turn to look at you! If he keeps looking at the bowl, be patient... he will eventually turn to look at you.

Here are the next few steps. Take it slowly - but when he is consistently doing a step correctly then you can move on to the next!

Once he is consistently responding to the sound of his name, you want to start shaping the behavior so he is actually giving you eye contact. For many dogs, this is accomplished by warming up by practicing as you have been, then saying his name again but NOT clicking if he looks anywhere except your eyes. If he has been looking at, say, your hands, he'll likely try that again (since it has worked so well so far!), but be patient and wait. You are hoping that he will get frustrated, give up, and look up at you as if you say, "What??" As soon as he does, making eye contact, you C&T and praise! From now on, when practicing attention in a quiet area, your dog has to give actual eye contact to receive a C&T from you.



Sugar Bear is staring at Joey's hand, so Joey waits...



Sugar Bear looks up a Joey's face - C&T!

When your dog is quite reliably responding to you at this point (I hope you are remembering to say his name only ONCE) then you need to start being variable with how often you C&T a response. By doing this you can shape your dog's responses to be even better as well as decrease the risk that he will become food dependent. There are two ways in which his response can improve - how quickly he looks up at you, and how long he holds the eye contact. Shape each one separately! Say you decide to go for a quick response first. From then on, only C&T if he turns right away when you

say his name. If he takes too long, you can just ignore that or perhaps smile, but it earns no C&T. You might want to have better than usual treats for this, since he will need to work a little harder in order to figure out what exactly it is you want now. When you decide to work on length of eye contact, stop C&T'ing the instant he looks at you, instead holding out a bit. Increase the required time in little increments, say for a count of 2 at first. If he's still looking deeply into your eyes - C&T and give a jackpot! If he turns away too soon, ignore him for a moment. Then try again.

At this point your dog is ready to learn to respond even around distractions. To start this, have him sit in front of you. Say his name and C&T for a response. Then, while he is still focused on you, have another person approach from the side. Your dog will likely turn & look at her. She (your friend) should immediately turn away, ceasing to show any interest. You say his name and C&T a correct response. If he doesn't respond, then just wait a bit. It might take a minute or two but your dog will eventually lose interest in this now-boring visitor & look at you again. The instant he does, you C&T, giving a jackpot reward! Then your friend should approach again & repeat the above. You will find that very quickly your dog can hardly be bothered with the visitor. After all... YOU are far far more interesting! If your dog really has trouble with this, then he may not be ready for this step yet. Your friend can work to being able to pet your dog.

Notice that there are two ways in which you are making this exercise more difficult for your dog: length of eye contact required before you C&T AND responding in spite of a distraction. Initially, be sure to work on only ONE of those at a time. When working on length, do it without distractions. When introducing distractions, don't require any length of time, instead C&T'ing a quick look. In fact, when a dog responds at all in the face of a very strong distraction (such as another dog coming over to play), I would C&T as soon as he turned toward you, not even waiting for him to look up at your eyes. What a good boy for paying attention to you at all instead of playing! Work on all of the pieces separately like this, then you will be able to put them all together. This concept applies to every exercise you will teach your pet!

Please keep all of these training sessions SHORT & FUN. Stop when your dog is still enjoying the training!

From that point you can use it whenever, wherever... You are outside & he sees another dog you'd rather he didn't? If you practiced this faithfully you should be able to say his name & have him instantly turn to look at you instead of the other dog!

Whenever you get a "breakthrough" or an exceptional performance like that, be sure to give a jackpot reward! That could be a really delicious treat or 5-6 bits of treats, given one at a time to lengthen the time spent getting it. After the initial teaching, the reward doesn't have to be food. It is far better to vary the reward: sometimes food, sometimes a ball tossed, sometimes a belly rub, sometimes the door opened so he can go outside. Discover what things your dog is the most excited by! Dogs certainly vary with that - my older dog Bear loves human attention & ear rubs, while my younger Rottie, Teddy, was never happy unless her reward was food. She was a natural born piggie! Use your imagination & be unpredictable!

Have fun!

Mary Woodward & Susan Greenholt
Greenwood Dog Training School Wilmington, DE
*using positive methods to teach people how to teach their pets!