

HOW TO TEACH A DOG THEIR NAME

Dogs can be easily distracted by all of the exciting things going on in the world. But attracting and maintaining your dog's attention is the basis of all obedience training. Here are our top tips:

Why should I teach my dog to respond to their name?

It is a legal requirement to keep your dog under control at all times. The basis of this is teaching your dog to respond to their name when called. Whether in an emergency situation, or around other dogs and distractions, it's important that your dog finds it rewarding to respond to their name.

This can be done using a variety of attention and focus exercises to teach your dog that when they hear their name and they look at you, a reward will follow.

Basic things to start with

When you first start training, set up a calm, quiet environment with no distractions to help your dog succeed.

Practice makes perfect

Practise a minimum of 10 times per day, say the dog's name (from two to six feet away) and as soon as the dog looks at you, mark this behaviour with a marker word such as 'yes' or a clicker, and reward with food or play while giving lots of praise.

Maintain focus

Do not ask the dog to sit or do anything else before giving them a treat, as the reward is for looking at you when you say their name, not for any other behaviour.

You will soon notice your dog starting to offer their attention without being prompted; be prepared to reinforce this with a reward to encourage your dog to regularly check in with you.

ORIENTATION GAME:

Start in a place where there is least potential for distraction and where your dog is used to playing with you.

Throw a piece of your dog's daily food allowance out (about one metre away).

After they finish eating, they will naturally look back to you for more, mark this with a 'yes' or a click and throw another piece.

Once your dog is turning back consistently, introduce your dog's name just before they turn around then mark and reward.

You can make this game more exciting and keep your dog interested by putting a treat on the floor and as soon as your dog has eaten the food, say their name and run backwards. When they come, reward with food or a toy and give lots of praise.

Place another reward on the floor then repeat. And remember, it's supposed to be fun!

Remember your job is to assess the training environment and very gradually increase the level of distraction. If your dog is not responding to their name, go back a step to ensure success before increasing the level of distractions again. As you up the distractions, make sure your reinforcement (treats or play) increases in value.