
Attention Sound

Training your dog to respond to an attention noise is so important. It allows you to be able to interrupt an unwanted behavior, for example stealing a sock, or heading towards something that could be dangerous for them. Simply ignoring your dog just isn't all that effective or appropriate with curious puppies and ignoring doesn't stop rehearsal, the possibility of danger, or a reinforcement that might be just around the corner (or on the kitchen counter!).

Have a reliable cue for this exercise. Decide on whatever it is you want to use. It can be a word or a sound, it's up to you, just be constant with it (and you can teach more than one!).

Rules:

- Don't overuse it!
- Don't use your dog's name or recall cue! Those are separate. Have something special and distinctive.
- For every behavior you want to interrupt, you need to start rewarding an alternative and incompatible behavior from then on.
- When choosing a sound, pick something unique and distinctive. You can get creative, just make sure that you can replicate it easily.
- Don't be picky about the response you are expecting from the attention sound. Remember you are using this to interrupt a behavior, so it may be that your dog offers eye contact only, and that's just fine. If your pup orients to you or does run back (but he doesn't have to do that) it's an added bonus, so work with what he gives you and keep the purpose in mind for success!

Stage 1 - Establishing the Behavior

1. Get some treats and your pup.
2. Wait for your puppy to divert her attention off of you.
3. Make your attention sound.
4. Mark and reward when your puppy looks at you. Repeat step 2-4.
5. If your puppy comes to you, that is an added bonus. That's a good thing. If your puppy won't divert her attention off of you, go to the next step...
6. Next add movement. Hold your pup while you toss out a treat, then release your pup.
7. Just as your pup eats the treat, and before she does any other behavior, say your attention sound.
8. Say your reward marker for eye-contact, or orienting to you, or coming back to you - take what your pup offers, and reward by tossing out another treat. Remember you can always refine things later.
9. Play this at home with zero distractions first.
10. Then take it to a new room and work (new stuff = distractions) there. Play and toys can also be object to use for the cue, and then played with for the reward.

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Stage 2 - Cuing When Engaged

Next, you are going to practice the cue when your pup is otherwise engaged in an activity. Make sure that arousal levels are still low so that you and your puppy can be successful. Mark and reward desired behavior by tossing a treat, and then play the attention sound game for a little bit to reinforce the fun!

Stage 3 - Working Arousal Levels

The final step is to take it outside and work new distractions.

1. When going outside, I'd like you to first work a few foundation cues, just so you know your pup can listen and pay attention. Then release your puppy to explore.
2. Very quickly you will make your attention sound. When your puppy does the desired behavior (look at you, orient to you, or come back to you), say your reward marker and then hold out your hand to offer the reward. You can toss the treat on the ground if it is big enough and easy to find. If you don't like tossing food on the ground simply hold it in your hand for your dog to come and get. Praise your puppy too!
3. Then release your pup out to explore again and start walking around.
4. Repeat a few times.
5. Mix it up with other stuff (foundation cues, play, etc.) to keep things fun and interesting. Put productivity into play, and use play as a reward. Variety is the spice of life!!

Trainer Tips:

Remember that rewards don't have to just be food. Adding in praise is very important. Other rewards are things that your puppy loves - so a favorite toy, play, and affection (touch, scratches and petting) are all at your disposal and should be used so that your puppy learns to be flexible with rewards.