

## Orientation Games

Teaching your dog to orient back to you is super useful to improve focus and to interrupt unwanted behaviors and to get your dog's focus off distractions.

### The Relationship Bank Account

Your relationship with your dog is very important. Certain behaviors (especially ones that require focusing on you, being near you, or choosing you over something else) are relationship dependent: come, look, loose leash walking, to name just a few. The concept of relationship cues and exercises (trainer focus) is one of those situations where it helps to look at them as a bank account. You can pay into the bank account by, for example rewarding eye contact, orientation, remaining near you, coming back to you, etc., and these things teach very specific examples of focus behaviors, but, more importantly, when there is more money in the focus bank account, it makes other choices easier like choosing to orient away from a distraction. The specific behaviors that are being reinforced aren't as important as the concept that is being developed in investing in the bank account.

### Basic Orientation Game - Getting Behavior

1. Begin at home in a room and have a bowl with treats next to you tucked out of view. Work in a safe and easy environment within your dogs limits to ensure success.
2. Toss out a treat. After your dog eats the treat wait until your dog turns around toward you.
3. Mark the turn around and reward by tossing another treat out in a different direction.
4. Let them do this a couple of times and then do a restrained exercise.
5. Now hold your dog, and toss out a treat.
6. Pause for a moment and then release your dog with your release cue.
7. Repeat steps 2 though 4. Begin to get particular about having your dog's nose off the ground and your dog looking at you before marking and tossing another treat.
8. Have a mini break after a few repetitions to give your dog some praise and play, before starting again.
9. Keep games short and fun so you stop before your dog wants to stop.

### Forward Thinking: Forward Focus

Focus, by definition, means to pay particular attention to something. This might not necessarily be the handler - in fact we might not want it to always be the handler. Take an agility course, for example, where we want forward focus, or a send away in obedience or an outrun in herding.

Focus can be split into trainer focus and forward focus, and each makes up the series of behaviors that you consider a "focussed" dog would do. These might include, for example, offering eye contact to you the handler or an agility obstacle. The more we build value in these behaviors, the more we develop the skill of focus so that our dogs choose trainer focus or forward focus in place of distractions.

An example: Doc has excellent handler and forward focus. He chooses to look at me whenever we are out walking. People try hard to get his attention when he is working, but he won't look at them, he focuses on me or the direction we are walking. When we play ball or

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frisbee, people and dogs can walk y and he will still only go for the frisbee and ignore the distractions. It's only if I let him know that he can go say hi and release him that he will go over and see his doggie friends.

Creating a focus framework whereby the default is handler focus and forward focus is triggered in certain contexts in response to certain so-called "discriminative stimuli," which represent cues in the environment for our dogs like agility equipment or a dead toy on the ground has so many benefits. It puts an end to "eyeing" other dogs, people, etc., which Aussies and herding breeds in general have a bad habit of doing - that is for the livestock only! Dogs that eye or stare at other dogs are often barked at, lunged at, attacked and then subsequently develop reactivity to other dogs themselves. Having this framework in place helps prevent development of leash reactivity and those times where your dog may completely ignore you in favor of focussing on something in the environment.

Now, this is important. Making handler focus the default, you in no way sacrifice forward focus if you do agility or another sport where this is important with your dog - in fact, you make it stronger as now it becomes something special and reserved for certain forward focus opportunities!

## **VIDEO 2 - Orientation Fun!**

### **Side to Side Orientation Game**

Supercharge your orientation games, build fun and drive in the behavior, burn some energy and reinforce good default behavior all in one game! YUP! The Side to side version does just that.

1. Begin by tossing out a treat either to the left or right of you.
2. Be aware of your mechanics... When your dog is to the left of you, toss with your left hand to your right side. And when your pup is to the right of you, toss with your right hand to your left. Use a kind of bowling motion so your dog visually can identify the game well.
3. Mark the turn around - the orientation - and then toss to the other side.
4. Depending on where your pup is with this game, yo may or may not require the nose up and/or eye-contact.
5. Don't nag your dog! If he continues sniffing for a little while, wait! Maybe he missed a treat, or maybe something caught his attention. Whatever it is, wait for the decision to orient back to you again - this is focus; staying on task. It is far better to mark and reward the decision to focus back on you and the game than it is to cue anything. The fun of the game the reward for continuing to play will begin to out-weigh the sniffing and focus will improve. You can see the huge difference with the two demo pups - Josie the Red-tri is 3 months, and Kia the Black-tri is 14 months.
6. Over time you will begin to see your pup get quicker - quicker at turning around and quicker at going for the tossed treat. Sometimes Kia, the older pup turns before she gets the treat, just so she can keep an eye on me!

# *Limitless Pawsibilities*

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7. To end the game, you can mark the turn around and then reward from your hand in proximity. Even transition to the Pick Me! game. From there, depending on what is to come next, it might be a walk, toy switching or outside play time, or it might be some cues and a calmer game or a transition game to bring energy down into a lower level of arousal.

HAVE FUN!!!