



EYE CONTACT AND ATTENTION

In the dog world, direct eye contact is threatening to another dog. The polite and non-threatening way to greet a dog properly is NOT to give direct eye contact. But, we humans can't help ourselves! We love to look directly into the eyes of dogs and tell them how beautiful they are! We may love it, but most dogs don't. So, teaching your dog that eye contact by a human is not threatening and actually brings good things is really, really important!

Why is "Attention" so important to teach your puppy?

Because if you can get and keep your puppy's attention, you can prevent or interrupt unwanted behaviors. Attention is a powerful thing!

And, your puppy is going to be very distracted smelling things and checking things out. So, teaching your puppy "attention" skills can help greatly when you're teaching your pup new skills and commands.

Attention Exercises:

Try this indoors first.

First, stand up straight and stand in front of your puppy. Take a treat or even a toy and lead it up to your eyes letting your puppy follow it and say " [your puppy's name] look at me!" When your puppy looks at you, immediately reward with a treat. Note: it is not necessary to get your puppy into a "sit" however it's a good way to practice your sits. And if your dog jumps on you, simply move back but continue talking to your puppy to keep the exercise going. Repeat and reward when your puppy looks at you. Then, try to keep your puppy's attention by happily talking to them (be silly – say whatever you need to keep their attention!). As they continue to look at you – SHOVEL the treats in! You need to teach your puppy that looking at you brings good things. If your puppy looks away (and they will!), just simply call them back. When they turn back and look at you – reward! If your puppy is disinterested, first use higher reward treats and get more verbal and animated. Remember – you are competing with a lot of distractions so make it fun and interesting for your puppy to look at you instead. If your puppy has lost complete interest, end the exercise and start over later on.

Keep your attention exercises short (begin with 20-40 seconds and move up to 30-60 then 1min to 2 min) and frequent.

In the beginning, try for 3 seconds of looking at you (without rewards). Then try for 5 seconds, then try for 10 seconds. You get the picture.

Keep building on this. Eventually work towards not only seconds of keeping their attention but MINUTES! (Remember this takes time and practice!)

Teaching Attention from the side:

Have your puppy sit by your side and follow the steps above. Once you've got their attention at a stationary position, you can take a few steps asking for their attention. Note – this is the beginning of heel work / loose leash walking.

Once your puppy's attention is good inside, begin working on it outside. Since you will be competing with many distractions, start from the beginning. Try for 3 seconds and build on that. Eventually you want to work up to minutes of attention outside too. Remember, this takes lots of practice!

Never stop working on attention. This is great exercise to do every day!