

Look at That!

Objective: Dog glances at stimulus and then reorients to handler.

Why:

The Look At That (LAT) game is borrowed and adapted from Control Unleashed by Leslie McDevitt. This exercise is intended to help the dog feel safe around any triggers, and hopefully reduce any conflict or overwhelm they are experiencing.

We are pairing the sight of a distraction or worrisome stimulus with a click and a treat. It sounds counterintuitive, because if I click my dog for looking at a distraction, won't that encourage him to look away more often? No. What does happen is we have a dog who goes from looking at a distraction in a reflexive way, to a dog who quickly, and operantly, glances at a distraction and then immediately looks back to the handler.

Dogs are living creatures. If something changes in their environment, or if they are worried about something, they will look at it. It's normal, and not super effective to try to eliminate completely. By turning that normal glance into an operant behavior that we can reinforce, we reduce the conflict the dog is feeling, which makes it easier for the dog to feel comfortable and focus on the training.

To train this behavior:

1. Start with totally neutral distractions around your house.
2. When your dog glances at the distraction, click and feed a treat from your hand.
3. Focus on clicking as soon as the dog's head starts to turn towards the distraction. Or even the very first ear flick.
4. If the dog does not respond to the click, move away from the distraction.
5. Once you've got the hang of it, take it outside. Try to capture any glances or ear flicks towards the environment as quickly as possible.

Use this ANY TIME in your training sessions that the dog is even a bit distracted.