

“LOOK” OR “WATCH” ME (FOCUS) CUE

“Look” or “Watch Me” – A command that asks your dog to make and hold eye contact with you. This exercise is useful for all dogs, and is an excellent substitute behavior for dogs that are reactive on leash or are nervous in new situations.

To teach “Look” or “Watch Me”:

Step 1: Reward voluntary eye contact

1. Have a treat bag or handful of small, tasty treats.
2. Start in an area with no distractions, someplace the dog is somewhat accustomed to. Use a leash if necessary to keep your dog from wandering off.
3. Stand quietly and wait for your dog to look at you or, for shy dogs, even in your general direction.
4. When she does, say “Yes!” (or click or whatever your marker word is) and give her a treat.
5. If she looks away (at the treat bag or your hand) simply wait for her to look back at you.
6. When she does, say “Yes!” and give her a treat.
7. Do the above rapidly and every time she looks at you or as she is holding eye contact.
8. For brief lapses of attention, you can say your dog’s name and reward for eye contact.

Step 2. Reward the choice for attention (rather than looking at reward). Add verbal cue “Look” or “Watch Me”

1. Hold treats in both hands out at your sides (like Jesus on a cross)
2. Most dogs will focus on the baited hands for a few moments before they look at you like “hey, where’s the treat?”. When they do make eye contact with you, say “Yes” and give a treat from either hand.
3. Do this a few times, moving your hands closer to your face if it is too distracting for your dog when your arms are outstretched.
4. Add the verbal cue “Look” or “Watch Me” and use this cue to get and maintain eye contact going forward.
5. Say “Yes” and reward every time she looks at you or as she is holding eye contact.

Step 3: Add distractions to Step 2.

1. Move to the backyard, the front yard, and down the street to practice.
2. If your dog is leash reactive, practice this command in the presence of other dogs but at a distance your dog will still be able to focus on you, or at least give you intermittent attention. Work with a trainer if you’re having problems with this.