

Four Footed Forum

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(assisted by Skeeter, Tucker, Abby 1998)

Managing Your Dog Outdoors Without a Leash

Some dogs, regardless of how attentive they are indoors, find the lure of outdoors more reinforcing than you are. Some are extremely distracted by the smells, sights, and freedoms of the outdoors. Others are simply very independent. To keep both of these types of dogs under control outdoors you may need to combine the command "leave it" with the constant use of the long line. In applying both management and reinforcement skills to teach your dog how to behave outside, you must do the following:

Management

1. ALWAYS have a long line on the dog. Whether the dog is working or playing or peeing - the long line should always be on. (Start with about 40 feet. As the dog begins to mature and focus more on you, the length of the long line can be gradually shortened until finally it is nothing more than a tag line.)
2. Your attention must always be on your dog unless he is in a down or sit stay. You must always be watching, ready to reinforce right choices and to stop inappropriate choices before they happen (always noticing and reinforcing calm watchfulness).
3. You have taught the "leave it" command inside and are now prepared with great food and toy rewards outside to use "leave it" when the dog is being distracted or lured away from working with you. When your dog begins sniffing, trying to greet other dogs or people, wandering off, and doesn't give eye contact when using his name, step on the long line and say "leave it". The moment the dog changes the distracted behavior and looks at you, click and treat. Then play, making yourself fabulous so the "leave it" will always mean its worth his while to stop what he's doing and see what you have for him.

Your goal is to have a dog that assumes the party is with you - period! You can't just go out and let your dog exercise himself. **You don't want your dog to learn that he can find better reinforcers than you have by not listening to you. He must be focused on you.**

Reinforcement:

All the best running, tugging, chasing games are done outdoors. Going outside should be the place your dog believes he can have the most fun with you. If your dog isn't bouncing around, always looking at you for the next good game, then you need to work on your reinforcement relationship. If you haven't put your complete energy and attention into developing a great play relationship, your dog will believe the rest of the world is more fun than you are. So if your dog doesn't want to play with you, but instead wants to head into the woods, you know that you need to raise his pay (play!). Outdoors should mean two things to your dog - bathroom duties or playing/working with you. If you let your dog learn

to self reinforce (crittering, chewing rocks, carrying sticks, swimming by himself, etc.) you've put the dog in charge of his own paycheck.

1. Play the games that your dog shows you he is attracted to:
 - a. Chasing (thrown objects: balls, kongs, sticks, Frisbees) To make chasing games work means playing 2 or 3 toys so that the dog has to return to you to keep playing. Always capitalize on the dog's belief that "What's mine is mine, and what's yours should be mine" That means you always have to have what your dog wants.
 - b. Tugging (combine chasing for exercise with tugging for those dogs that love holding on and pulling. You'll swap the tugging toy for an identical version of it and start the throw/tug game again.
 - c. Scent games: hide the toy and let all his sniffing behaviors get used. Throwing the toy in dense areas combines chasing with scent work. Combine stay with hiding and then release your dog to find.

2. Use food and your clicker to mark any good choice while outside working and/or playing. Food reinforcement works particularly well for self control behaviors like:
 - watching and not growling at strange people or dogs,
 - watching and not chasing
 - coming back immediately when asked to leave it or recalled
 - attention to you when a distraction is nearThe clicker and food are best used to reinforce good non-moving behaviors. Toys are the best reinforcement for moving behaviors.

Special Note -

As we head into the warm summer months, a reminder about dogs and cars. The temperature inside a parked vehicle during the summer can rise to dangerous levels very rapidly, even if the windows are partially open. Leaving your dog in the car while you run a few errands can be life threatening for your pet. Avoid any potentially tragic situations by leaving your dog at home. He will be more comfortable and much safer in the house.