

Proper Socialization to Environments

There are so many things for our dogs to learn about outside! Some things are scary, some are smelly, some move fast, and some might need to be chased! We need to work with our dogs so they have proper reactions to different environments, even those that may come as a surprise.

Two commands I like to teach for more control outside are “Leave It!” and “Watch Me!” often in conjunction. I also use “Check It!” when experiencing something new.

I teach and/or capture “Watch Me”. Training with a treat, I hold it close to my face asking for “Watch Me” and rewarding when the dog looks at me. Next step is moving the treat away from my face (hold your arm out straight to the side) and when the dog looks away from the treat to you, say “Good Watch Me” and reward. Over time, as with all training, treats fade away and vocal praise and pets are enough. We teach them to look at us for direction, for confidence, and to distract them from things.

“Leave It” has more layers of training but in a nutshell the dog is taught to turn his head away from whatever has his attention and adding “Watch Me” teaches him to turn from it to look at you.

Outside when you come across something inanimate that worries your dog (like that scary rolling trash can) allow him to approach it at his own pace, using “Check It”. He may not go all the way in but reward for what he does, especially if he relaxes more after he has “checked” it. Then walk away, making that another part of the reward. The more interaction he has with items that worry him but cause no harm, the less afraid he will be.

“Leave It” can be used for yummy things on the ground--a discarded burrito for example. It is used before he picks something up. If he already has it, you need to ask him to “Drop It”. I will use “Leave It” and add “Watch Me” for the yummy things, for squirrels, or for anything he does not need to investigate or be a part of. The more desirable the item, the more I will reward when he does “Leave It” and “Watch Me”.

The more places you visit with your dog, the more experience and confidence he will gain. I like to have people visit shopping centers with their dog to see all kinds of new things like automatic doors, shopping carts, outdoor dining, and fancy trash cans. If the shopping center has a pet store you can visit at the end of your visit for a yummy dog treat, it’s a bonus.

Realize that some places may make your dog more nervous. Gauge how he is doing and if it is too much, go home. You do not want to stress him out. On some visits you may only spend a few minutes and that is fine. Your dog needs to trust that you will keep him safe.

