



Choose to Look

This exercise builds focus and attention even in distracting environments. In order for our dogs to walk by our side, they have to be aware of where we are and what we are doing. If we turn away from our dog, it is quite easy for them to just keep moving forward until they are attentive to our movements. We don't want to have to spend our entire walk repeatedly telling our dog to look at us though, it is something we need them to learn to do on their own as a part of the walk.

Start by working on eye contact in a stationary position in a low distraction environment. Bring your dog into heel position with your Side cue and have them sit. Once they are at your side, ask for eye contact. Continue to ask for eye contact, mark and reward, and ask again.

Once you have rewarded the eye contact a handful of times, stop asking for it. Stand there, watching your dog, and wait. Let them look at whatever they want to look at. If they get up and walk away, reset them back into a sit in heel position, but otherwise just stand and wait. Any time they glance up at you, click and treat.

Make sure you are not hovering your hand in or over your treat pouch. The eye contact must be unprompted. If they begin to really show interest in something else and you feel the chance of them glancing up at you again versus deciding to get up and wander off is low, try making a loud sigh or a soft squeak to prompt them to glance up. The key is to have it not be a cue or command...don't say their name or ask for the look - they need to think it was their idea to check in. As soon as they glance up, click and treat.

After practicing this, you will notice your dog begin to stare up at you when they are at your side. At that point you can begin to increase the distraction level. Try moving to a place where your dog can watch things at a distance. Allow your dog to watch, but click and treat whenever they choose to look up at you. Again, you can make a quiet sound to try to pull their attention if you need to, but don't over use it. If you find they are not making the choice to look up frequently, move back to a less distracting environment.

Once your dog is choosing to look up at you in the presence of minor distractions, you can begin to add movement. You will want to return to a lower distraction environment when you first add the movement. For movement, you will begin heeling short distances, clicking and treating whenever your dog chooses to look up at you. Just like

with any walking, if they begin pulling/move out of heel position, stop all forward movement and do not continue until they return to your side. As your dog begins offering more and more eye contact (during walking, I call it a “check in”) you can extend the length of time you are walking for as well as slowly add distractions. Remember not to expect your dog to do focused heeling for long periods of time. After a minute or two, always reward them by releasing them to sniff/explore.