



## The “Look at That” Game

This game is for Reactive or Shy dogs. It is all about changing the emotional response to the triggering stimuli with counter-conditioning.

1. Start in a low distraction environment. Introduce a low-level distraction (could be a strange object or something interesting) at a distance.
2. As soon as your dog looks at the distraction, click, and then give a treat.
3. If they look again, click, and give a treat.

If your dog barks at a stranger or another dog, it can be tempting to try to “correct” the behavior (a leash yank, a shout of NO! Or an aversive tool). The correction may even temporarily reduce the reaction from happening again. However, the behavior that we are seeing (the barking, the lunging, the growling, whatever reaction it may be) is in response to an emotional reaction. Adding a negative to the already emotional situation for your dog can emphasize their negative emotions towards that stimuli. The emotions that they are now bottling up can pop up again, even worse, in the future. Instead we want to address the root source of the emotional outburst instead of suppressing the symptoms of it.

We want to pair the triggering stimuli with something positive (high value treats work great for this). This is counter-conditioning. Everytime they look at the trigger, they get a click and a treat. The clicker is important for making sure our dog is feeling the exciting anticipation of the treat in the exact moment they are looking at the trigger. It is also important to use high-value treats for this to make strong new associations that outweigh the negative ones. These changes to their emotional responses won't happen with low level treats. You will want to have treats that are exclusive to these sessions. If you give the same tasty treats for everything, they lose their value. You want them to be uniquely associated with the trigger.

Over time your dog will also learn to look at you when they see a trigger (in fact, the sight of the trigger becomes the cue for them to look to you for further instruction instead of the cue to bark). However, it is important that we are not asking for them to look at us. Remember, we are working on emotions, not behaviors. Remember to let them look at the trigger. If they are only focused on the food and not given a chance to view the trigger, they may not be making the connection they need to make.

It is important with the Look at that Game that your dog is under threshold. You don't want to be trying to play this game while your dog is having an explosion. When your dog is over-threshold, they cannot learn. Find a distance that your dog is comfortable with and start there. Increase the difficulty slowly, at your dog's pace. Start with small triggers far away and gradually decrease your distance. Then you can move on to a bigger trigger far away and gradually decrease your distance from the bigger trigger. Remember that changing emotions and behavior takes time. Don't rush through the process.

Whenever possible, it works best to set-up controlled scenarios for your dog at first instead of starting in real-life situations. For example, having someone assist you by standing with a neutral dog at a distance instead of going to a park with unknown unpredictable dogs. Try to spread the training out in short sessions sprinkled throughout the day, not all in one session spaced far apart. Dogs will learn that things are okay under certain circumstances but not others so we need to make sure to add variety to our sessions.

Note: For noise sensitive dogs, this same process can be done with sounds. "Hear that" instead of "Look at That".