

TEACHING “DROP IT” AND RETRIEVING STOLEN ITEMS

Teaching “Drop It” The goal is to teach the dog to give up items with a verbal command. Two weeks of daily short (3- to 5-minute) training sessions should establish this command. Dogs with a history of severe aggression with object possession may need additional safety measures and counseling before attempting any training.

1. Start by using an item of low value that the dog has never guarded or stolen.
2. Identify a high value reward item. Rewards need to be hidden (e.g., treat pouch behind body or in a back pocket) so the dog will not be totally focused on the reward.
3. Since dogs are more likely to relinquish an item of which they only have partial control, you should start by engaging the dog in a gentle game of tug with a low value item. The human should stop tugging. With a low value item and no pulling on the item by the owner, the dog is likely to release the item. As the pet opens her mouth to release the item, the owner then pairs the verbal cue “drop it” and offers the pet a fabulous reward. Repeat several times so that the dog begins to pair the verbal cue with the action and subsequent reward.
4. If the pet does not relinquish the item, find a lower value item with which to practice or wait until the dog does relinquish the item (eventually it will let it go). Reward the dog when it releases the item.
5. Next, start to use the verbal cue as a prompt to drop the item, still stopping active pulling before making the verbal request.
6. With success, gradually make the request more challenging by allowing the dog to have full control of the item before requesting the drop and/or increasing the value of the item.
7. If the dog doesn’t release the item, don’t repeat the command multiple times or try to steal the items back. Simply withdraw all attention from the dog and don’t give any reward. During the next training opportunity, modify the situation so success is more likely (less valuable item, retain partial control of item, etc.).
8. Repeat until the response is reliable, then begin to phase out the food by skipping the food reward on some repetitions.
9. As you increase the value of the item, you may need to reinstate continuous food rewards until the drop command becomes reliable.
10. Once the drop it command is well established, it can be used to retrieve stolen items.

Retrieving Stolen Items: This exercise should only be done by an adult who has control of the dog, NEVER by children. This exercise should only be used if the item is potentially dangerous to the dog or the item is highly valuable to the family.

1. Use highly valued rewards (i.e., table food).
2. Show the food to the dog from 5–6 feet away.

3. Give the command “come.”
4. When the dog leaves the item, back up and call the dog again and add, “sit.”
5. Repeat two to three times without giving the dog the food reward until he is at least 15–20 feet from the object, preferably in another room.
6. Give the dog the food reward.
 - a. If possible, gently take the collar and put the dog into another room with a closed door or outside.
 - b. If the dog will not allow you to touch the collar, do not attempt this; rather use another food reward to lead the dog into another room where you can shut the door.
7. After the dog is contained in another area securely away from the item, go and retrieve the item.
8. The exchange NEVER takes place right in front of the dog and the item.