

LEAVE IT!

“Leave it” is a useful and potentially lifesaving skill to teach your dog. It means not to look at, approach, or pick up something. Imagine if you accidentally drop prescription pills in the bathroom or spill chocolate chips in the kitchen, and your dog comes running to “help” you clean up! You’ll be glad you taught your dog to leave it alone!

Phase 1

Preload your hands so that your timing is good, and use two types of food: a lower-value kibble in your “leave it” hand, and a higher-value treat in your “reward” hand.

- **Closed fist:** For a couple of sessions, say “leave it” and put your closed hand with a piece of kibble inside right in front of your dog’s nose. (Hold your reward hand out of sight, behind your back.) The instant your dog stops mugging your hand, praise them and deliver their reward from your other hand. When they’re reliably leaving your closed fist alone, they’re ready for open palm.
- **Open palm:** For several more sessions, say “leave it” and show your dog your flat open palm with a piece of kibble in the center. If they try to go for it, just close your fingers around the treat without jerking your hand away. Reopen your hand once they stop. Don’t repeat the cue — just wait for them to leave the treat alone in your open palm. Then praise them and give them their reward from your other hand.
- **Switch hands:** For both the closed fist and open palm versions, once your dog succeeds with leaving one hand alone, switch which hand holds the kibble and which holds the treat. Also, practice presenting your hand in different locations: to your dog’s right, to the left, and down toward the floor.

Phase 2

This time you’re going to place the kibble on a surface, not in your hand, so keep one hand empty. Do, however, preload the other hand with the high-value treat.

- **On your knee:** Say “leave it,” and put a piece of kibble on your knee. (You can sit or squat — whichever’s more comfortable for you.) If your dog goes for it, quickly cover it with your hand. Wait until they give up, then uncover it again. Don’t repeat your cue. Keep this up, covering and uncovering, until they leave the uncovered tidbit alone. Then praise your dog and deliver their reward from your other hand.
- **On a chair:** Exactly the same as above, except place the kibble on a chair. Keep your hand close by, ready to cover up the kibble if your dog goes for it.
- **On the floor:** Sitting or standing, tell your dog to “leave it,” and place a piece of kibble on the floor. Be ready to “save” the tidbit if your dog goes for it by covering it with (with your hand if you’re sitting, your foot if you’re standing). As usual, keep it covered until they stop trying to get it, and then uncover it again. If they leave it alone uncovered for one second, praise your dog and reward them with the treat.



- **Build duration:** Once your dog succeeds at all three variations, you can build up the length of time for your dog to leave the kibble alone before rewarding them with the treat. Repeat all three variations with longer periods of time: two seconds, five seconds, 10 seconds. (You probably won't need to go much longer than 10 seconds.) Don't forget to throw in shorter, easier time lengths occasionally so that it's not always getting harder for your dog.