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## AHNA Puppy Preschool: "Leave it", "Drop it", and "Take it"

### What is "Leave it/Take it/Drop it"?

During this exercise, we teach the dog that she may only take something if instructed to do so, and that she must release whatever she has when requested to do so.

### Why Is "Leave it/Take it/Drop it" So Important?

By teaching the dog to leave things, take them, or release them on command, we may defuse a potentially dangerous behavior- guarding valued objects, such as food and toys. Many of you probably know at least one dog who growls and snaps if you get near his food dish or toys, and this can be very dangerous behavior both for the dog and for anyone who deals with the dog.



### How Does "Leave it/Take it/Drop it" Work?

For animals it is perfectly reasonable to guard things like food and toys because life has taught them that if an object gets taken away, it goes away forever. In this exercise we teach the dog that it's not the end of the world if someone takes away her food or toy because she will probably get it back, and if she doesn't, she'll get something of equal or greater value in its place. We do this by repeatedly offering the food (and, in tug-of-war, the toy) only when the dog is sitting quietly, by repeatedly taking the food or toy back, praising the dog and offering a food reward for releasing the item, and then returning the item. What a great deal for the dog! Before this exercise, the dog might have thought it foolish to release a valued object. After the exercise, the dog thinks it would be foolish not to. Thus the dog doesn't need to get upset about releasing a valued object, and in fact does so quite willingly. This makes for a much happier and safer dog, and a much happier person the first time their new doggy picks up a piece of rotting trash.

### How Do You Practice "Leave it/Take it"?

During this exercise the dog is learning basic etiquette (not to take the food until it is offered) and also a very important concept: she gets the food by leaving the food. It will take many repetitions until this sinks in entirely (because it is quite counterintuitive and probably goes against all the dog's experience up until this point), but once it does sink in, you have a much safer and happier dog.

- DO work with the dog on a leash, anchored.
- DO hold a piece of kibble in your closed fist, say "Leave it" once, and allow the dog to sniff and lick your fist.
- DO allow the dog to worry at the kibble for as long as she likes; eventually she will give up and withdraw her muzzle. (Some do take longer than others, but all dogs give up eventually; have patience and wait it out.)
- DO say "Yes, take it" the instant the dog breaks contact with your hand, and offer a higher value treat from your other hand.
- DO repeat this several times. On successive repetitions, delay offering the treat for longer and longer after the dog breaks contact.
- When you have the impression the dog understands the game, delay offering the treat for longer and longer after the dog breaks contact.
- On successive repetitions, keep the kibble in your **open** hand and say "leave it". If the dog tries to eat the kibble, close your hand to a fist and say "oops". The "oops" will become a signal for your dog to let him know he did something wrong. If he leaves the kibble alone, say "yes" and offer the high value treat with your other hand with a "take it".
- You can start putting a piece of kibble on the floor and tell your dog to leave it. Be prepared to cover the kibble with your hand in case your dog wants to eat it. Use "oops" and "yes, take it" as described above.
- Also try to drop a piece of kibble on the floor while you are standing. Say "leave it" and be prepared to cover the kibble up with your foot.
- Alternate irregularly between using your open hand, dropping kibble, and putting kibble on the floor.
- Once he understands the game, you don't have to use the high value treat out of your other hand all the time.

You can just uncover the "forbidden" treat and offer it with a "take it".

Modified after "Open Paw™ - Four Level Training Program For People And Dogs" by Kelly Gorman and Colleen Boyle.