

Watch me!

Redirecting your dog's attention from something you don't want him to do to looking at you for a "reward".

Dogs bark, chase and bite things for natural reasons. Some of those reasons are based in play/prey (learning to hunt) and some of those reasons are fear based (feeling threatened by other dogs, children or adults).

Managing your dog so that you are always present when the stimulus is in sight is the first and most critical part of your training plan. You not only have to be there, but the stimulus must have someone controlling it as well. If your puppy can't leave the cat alone, then the puppy must never have access to cat unless you are there and prepared to reward for alternative behavior. **And** a friend has to have the cat in their arms or the cat might be loose with a kiddy gate between the puppy and the cat. If your dog's problem is dog aggressive then the other dog must be on leash and handled by someone working at your command regarding distance from you. Your goal is to never stimulate the dog into a mistake, but to stimulate only enough to give you a chance to reinforce an alternate behavior in the presence of the stimulus - looking at you will become the way to behave when other dogs or children are present!

Have wonderful food treats ready. Have the dog on leash so he can't go toward the stimulus. When the stimulus gets close enough to have the dog look at (but not chase or bark) it, then you take your food treat, swing it by your dog's nose to get his attention. Say "Watch me" while bringing the food hand up to the bridge of your nose and tap your nose till your dog looks at you. Mark the looking at your face with a click or yes and reinforce either from your hand or by dropping treat on floor. Depending on your dog, dropping the treat a little ways from you restarts the dog's behavior of looking at the stimulus and so you can then ask for "watch me" and reinforce. Another really good idea is toss the treat gently at your dog so he learns to catch it. This keeps him really focussed on you cause he won't want to miss catching the treat. If you feed from your hand do it palm open (like a horse) and don't open your hand until the dog is waiting for permission to take it.

Your goal is many fast, well reinforced "Watch Me's". Once your dog understands the meaning of the words "Watch Me" you should stop luring with the food before tapping your nose. If the stimulus is very strong and the dog can't hear you say "Watch Me", go back to luring with the food in front of the nose to get his attention, but don't reinforce till you have his eyes on your face. As you progress ask for longer eye/face contact before reinforcing. As you get good self control at this first distance, then very slowly change distance and/or location of the stimulus. Remember...challenge for success not failure. Never test beyond your dog's ability to be reinforced for choosing you over the stimulus.

You are training a behavior substitution. You will get improvement early, but you must be vigilant and not expect permanent change for at least a year.

You can never let up managing dogs with very high prey behavior or fear aggression. You must always reinforce when you see them exercise self-control (which is when they watch but don't chase or growl and bark.).