



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

10 Ways to Get Your Dog's Focus on You in Public

By Trelle Dandridge - Mutts with Manners

Distractions are everywhere when you take your dog into the real world, other dogs, people, squirrels, new smells. Teaching your dog to focus on you in public is one of the most valuable skills for safety and everyday manners. The key is to make yourself the most rewarding thing around.

Here are 10 ways to capture and keep your dog's attention in public, plus simple exercises you can practice today.

Use your dog's name wisely

Your dog's name should mean "pay attention", not "you're in trouble".

Exercise:

- Indoors, say your dog's name in a happy tone.
- The moment they look at you, mark ("Yes!" or click) and reward
- Practice until name equals eye contact (or face contact for shy dogs) every time.
- Slowly move this exercise outside.

Bring High-Value Rewards

Distractions outside compete with you. Make sure you have something better than the environment.

Exercise:

- Before a walk, pack soft, bite-size treats your dog doesn't usually get.
- In a mildly distracting place, ask for eye contact. Reward generously.
- Use "jackpot rewards" (several treats at once) for big wins like ignoring another dog.

Teach the "Look at me" Cue

This cue creates a reliable way to get eye contact.

Exercise:

- Hold a treat near your eyes and say, "Look" or "Focus".
- When your dog meets your gaze (or looks at the treat in your hand in the beginning), mark and reward.
- Build duration (1 second, 2 seconds, 5 seconds).
- Take it to the yard, then the sidewalk, then the park.

Make Yourself Fun

If you're predictable and boring, your dog will tune you out.

Exercise:

- Try a "silly walk" game: walk quickly, then slowly, then jog, rewarding your dog for staying with you
- Use a playful voice or clap your hands to spark interest
- Reward attention with treats, toys, and permission to sniff.



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The "Check In" Game

This teaches your dog to offer attention without being asked.

Exercise:

- While standing still, wait for your dog to glance at you
- The instant they do, mark and reward.
- On walks, reward every voluntary check-in. Over time, your dog will make it a habit.

Keep Training Sessions Short

Dogs learn best in short bursts. Asking for too much too soon causes frustration.

Exercise:

- On a walk, ask for 30 seconds of attention, then release your dog to sniff as a reward.
- Alternate between focus time and free-sniffing breaks.
- Gradually increase focus time as your dog improves.

Incorporate Movement

Movement resets your dog's brain and helps redirect focus.

Exercise:

- While walking, suddenly change direction with a cheerful "Let's go!"
- Reward your dog for following you.
- Repeat randomly so your dog learns to watch your body for clues.

Use Toys as Attention Magnets

For toy-motivated dogs, toys can work even better than food.

Exercise:

- Bring a favorite squeaky or tug toy on walks.
- When distractions appear, squeak the toy or offer a quick game of tug.
- Reward attention with a short play session, then return to the walk.

Reward Calm Around Distractions

Don't wait for your dog to bark or lunge—reward calmness before reactivity starts.

Exercise:

- At a distance from a distraction (another dog, skateboard, person), mark and reward calm behavior.
- Practice the "Look at That" game: when your dog glances at the distraction, mark and reward for turning back to you.
- Slowly decrease distance as your dog succeeds.



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Practice in Increasingly Challenging Places

Dogs don't generalize on their own, you need to practice everywhere.

Exercise:

- Week 1: Practice in your living room.
- Week 2: Backyard.
- Week 3: Quiet street.
- Week 4: Busier park.
- Only move forward when your dog is successful at the current level.

Pro Trainer Tips

Keep treats small so you can reward often without overfeeding.

Use a treat pouch for easy, quick delivery.

If your dog isn't responding, move farther from the distraction and use a higher value reward like chicken breast (only for focus work).

End on a win—even a few seconds of focus is worth celebrating.

Patience + consistency = long-term success.

Final Thoughts

Getting your dog's attention in public isn't about forcing obedience—it's about building habits where your dog sees you as the best option, no matter the environment. With consistency, high-value rewards, and fun exercises, your dog will learn that focusing on you is always worth it.

Rescue is our passion, positive reinforcement is our promise. www.muttswithmanners.com