



INSIGHT
ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SERVICES

Offered Attention

OA 1 – The Offered Attention Game*

Attention is the most foundational skill for training success because...

Attention is needed for Listening, and Listening is needed for Learning.

Attention on request is good, but building your dog's desire to offer you their attention, as opposed to you cuing (or nagging) them for it is less work for you in the long run.

Also, if you know that your dog loves this behavior (aka has been reinforced for it many times in the past) and you enter a situation where they're not offering you their attention – that is useful information. It allows you to take stock, learn what is challenging for them, and create a plan to set you both up for future success.

What You Need

- A quiet, distraction-free learning environment.
- Many small, high-value (according to your dog) treats.
- If you have a marker word (such as YES), then you'll use it. If you don't, then your dog will learn it!

A Quick Note on 'Markers'

In animal training, a *marker* is a sound or word that occurs at the precise moment the animal performs the desired behavior. To the animal, the marker is a *ding-ding-ding* signal to let them know they've won a prize. To the trainer, it's a way to pinpoint the desired behavior that they're reinforcing so that it occurs more frequently in the future. When we use a marker, we call it 'marking.' So when you see the word 'mark' in the instructions below, it means 'say your marker word' or 'make your marker sound' (e.g. with a clicker). You can use any short word, phrase or sound for your marker – common choices include YES, GOOD, TREAT, DING, CLICK, or YIP.

Offered Attention 1a. Getting Started

1. Start standing in front of your dog (sitting or lying down is allowed at this stage, but not necessary).
2. Place a treat on the ground right in front of their front paws and encourage them to eat it.
3. As they finish chewing, watch for movement of their head towards you > mark > pause one second > move your hand to deliver a treat directly to their mouth.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 four (or so) more times, then say ALL DONE and give your dog a treat scatter to transition them out of training. Change your position/location to make it clear for your dog that training is over.

Tips and Tricks

- **Short, quick sessions of 5-10 repetitions spread throughout the day - aim for at least 3 daily.**
- **Pre-load one hand** with at least 10 treats so that you can quickly and cleanly deliver them without the interruption of digging in your pouch, pockets, or treat bag.
- **Keep food out of sight** (your food hand behind your back or in your pocket).
- **No talking** (aside from your marker word).
- **Mark THEN move** to feed - if you move first, or move as you mark, *your dog will start to stare at your hand.*
- Deliver the hand-fed treat by first bringing it directly in front of you, then lowering it down to your dog.
- If your dog becomes distracted, wait for them to turn away from the distraction (towards you) and mark when they do (just as you would in step 3 when they are turning their head back to you after eating the treat on the ground).
- If your dog disengages from you entirely, say ALL DONE and end the session. Try your next session in a less distracting environment (use a bathroom or closet if you need to) and/or with higher value treats.

Offered Attention 1b. Direct Eye Contact

- After you've played OA 1a at least 3-5 times, you can start helping your dog offer **direct eye contact instead of just general attention.** (If you already have this, move to Step 1c.)
- Place the treat on the ground, but then instead of immediately marking the first movement of your dog's head towards you, pause briefly to give them the chance to look more specifically towards your face.
- When they make a head movement that is closer to offering eye contact than any movement they've made before - mark and feed, then place a treat on the ground just as before.
- When they're reliably looking at your face, pause briefly for them to look directly at your eyes.

[Click here for a demonstration video.](#)

Offered Attention 1c. Practice in Many Different Situations

- Once you have direct eye contact, play this game in at least 5 easy, non-distracting environments/situations before adding distraction.
- Add distractions one at a time (such as having a favorite toy nearby) or at very low intensity (such as in the middle of an empty parking lot or on your porch at a low traffic time).

*Adapted from Leslie McDevitt's Up Down Pattern - see her [Control Unleashed](#) book series for more information.