LAT ("Look At That"): A training tool for reactive behavior

LAT stands for "Look At That" – a protocol developed by Leslie McDevitt, CPDT-KA, CDBC, author of Control Unleashed. Used properly, this training protocol can have a huge positive impact on a reactive dog's behavior.

The key to the LAT game is **keeping your dog below threshold (showing quiet and calm behavior)** while teaching them to look at a scary or exciting stimulus, then repeatedly rewarding them just for looking at it. This way, you begin to pair looking at the scary stimulus (aka the "trigger") with something your dog loves (high-value food!). Practiced consistently, this can change your dog's emotional response to seeing a trigger from a negative one (scary or frustrating) to a positive one.

Before you begin:

- o For this training game, **make sure that you are using a very high value reward**, such as hot dogs, cheese, beef, chicken, bacon, pork chops, baby food, or whatever your dog likes best and does not get often. These can be cut into very small pieces for training – about a half a size of a pinky nail per treat.
- o Make sure that you are in an area and at a time of day where **YOU can determine how close or how far you get to the trigger**. Choose an area and time where triggers are not likely to "sneak up" on you. You may want to start at your front door or drive to a quiet area for a training session. Being able to manage distance effectively is a very important part of this game: **training with a reactive dog should not begin in a busy area or time of day.**

Steps of LAT:

- o **Keep your dog under threshold.** Make sure you are far enough away from the thing that triggers your dog's reactive behavior (dogs, people, men in hats, buses, etc.) so that they **can notice or look at it without going over threshold.** Indicators of going over threshold include behaviors such as barking, lunging, growling, whining, pulling towards the trigger, tense/upright posture, fixating without being able to regain attention, taking treats very hard, or not taking treats at all. Sometimes, in order to keep a dog under threshold, this means you will have to start this game at a **very large distance** from the trigger! If your dog is too close to threshold with the trigger at *any* distance, start practicing with a neutral target at home (any object that they do not react to).
- o **Click/Treat the second they look.** To play LAT, **the second they look at the trigger** (dog, tall person, person in hat, etc.), click a clicker or say the word "Yes!" to mark that behavior, then deliver a delicious treat. This is why it is so important to identify and remain at a distance at which your dog is not over threshold. **Once they are over threshold, their nervous system has gone into "fight or flight", and they are not in a space to learn a new skill.**
- o **Add the verbal cue.** When your dog is **already** offering a quick glance toward the trigger, add a cue such as "Look!" Your dog will quickly start to look at his scary triggers when you give the "Look!" cue and turn back to you for a reward. Keep rewarding their bravery!
- o **Keep sessions short and positive.** Practice with a handful of 5-10 treats, then give them a break by ducking behind a car, increasing distance from the trigger, or going home. Practice this exercise until your dog is calmly looking for triggers in anticipation of the click.

If your dog does not turn back to you quickly, they're probably too close to the trigger for their comfort, or your reward isn't high value enough. Increase the distance between you and the trigger and try again. Gradually decrease distance as your dog learns to play the LAT game with things they find worrisome. If you begin to see tense, nervous, or reactive behavior, you came to close to the trigger. Help your dog create some distance by moving in the opposite direction.

For Calm Cool and Collected, our specialty class for reactivity,
or for private training information, visit www.eastbayspca.org/training

For more information and behavioral support, contact our behavior department at www.eastbayspca.org/behaviorhelp