

Engage Disengage Training For Dogs

THE ENGAGE-DISENGAGE GAME

A training game for dogs who are FEARFUL, ANXIOUS, or FRUSTRATED around a specific trigger such as another dog, person, or sound. The goal is to first decrease the dog's fear/anxiety/frustration and then to teach the dog a new safe and appropriate behavior to do instead.

- PREP:**
- ☐ High value treats
 - ☐ Clicker (or verbal marker)
 - ☐ Humane harness or collar
 - ☐ Practice fast u-turns by luring your dog with a treat on his nose, or tossing "find-it" treats on the ground as you both walk away quickly in the opposite direction.
 - ☐ Take a break if you see subtle stress signals (displacement behaviors) such as excessive lip licking, yawning, or scratching.



PLAY FOR 1-5 MINUTES. TAKE A BREAK. REPEAT.

LEVEL 1: ENGAGE

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Start at a safe distance away from the trigger, where your dog is not reacting. Be quiet and still so your dog notices the trigger on his own.
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At the precise moment your dog ENGAGES by looking at the trigger, CLICK!
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When your dog turns his head towards you after the click, feed a treat.
If your dog reacts or is not turning back to you after the click, move further away from the trigger to reset at an easier distance.

LEVEL 1 GOAL:

To do at least 3-5 repetitions in a row at the same distance before moving on to LEVEL 2. A successful repetition is when your dog immediately turns back to you after the click.

If the trigger is moving or changing in intensity, keep playing LEVEL 1 until your dog has calmly looked at (or engaged with) the trigger from every direction. Then move on to LEVEL 2.

LEVEL 2: DISENGAGE

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Let your dog notice the trigger again, but now wait 1-5 seconds to see if he will offer to LOOK AWAY from the trigger on his own.
If your dog is fixating on the trigger for longer than 5 seconds, GO BACK to LEVEL 1.
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At the precise moment your dog DISENGAGES by looking away from the trigger, CLICK!
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After the click, feed a treat.
If your dog reacts or is not turning back to you after the click, move further away from the trigger to reset at an easier distance.

LEVEL 2 GOAL:

To do at least 3-5 repetitions in a row before moving 1-5 steps closer to the trigger. A successful repetition is when your dog comfortably disengages with the trigger on his own.

As you move closer, keep playing LEVEL 2 if the trigger is not moving or changing in intensity. If the trigger is moving or changing in intensity, go back to LEVEL 1 at the new distance.



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Engage disengage training for dogs is a powerful technique that helps dog owners manage their pets' behaviors in various situations. It is especially beneficial for dogs that exhibit overexcitement, reactivity, or lack of focus during walks or interactions with other animals and people. This training method emphasizes teaching dogs when to engage with their environment and when to disengage, fostering better impulse control and attention. In this article, we will explore the principles behind engage disengage training, its benefits, and practical steps to implement it effectively.

Understanding Engage Disengage Training

Engage disengage training is based on the idea that dogs can learn to control their impulses and focus on their owners rather than being distracted by external stimuli. This

method encourages dogs to engage with their surroundings in a controlled manner and to disengage when asked, thereby reducing unwanted behaviors such as barking, lunging, or excessive sniffing.

The Core Principles

1. **Impulse Control:** This training teaches dogs to manage their impulses effectively. Instead of reacting immediately to stimuli, dogs learn to wait for cues from their handlers.
2. **Focus:** Engage disengage training helps dogs concentrate on their owners rather than external distractions, leading to improved communication and stronger bonds.
3. **Reward Systems:** Positive reinforcement is a crucial component of this training. Dogs are rewarded for appropriate behaviors, encouraging them to repeat those actions.
4. **Consistency:** Like any training method, consistency is vital. Regular practice and reinforcement of the engage disengage commands help solidify the desired behaviors over time.

Benefits of Engage Disengage Training

Engage disengage training offers numerous advantages for both dogs and their owners:

1. **Improved Behavior:** This training helps reduce undesirable behaviors such as jumping, barking, or pulling on the leash, leading to more enjoyable outings and interactions.
2. **Enhanced Focus:** With better focus on their owners, dogs become more responsive to commands, making training sessions more productive.
3. **Increased Confidence:** Dogs learn to navigate their environments confidently, knowing they can rely on their owners for guidance.
4. **Stronger Bond:** As dogs learn to engage with their owners, the relationship between the pet and the owner deepens, creating a stronger bond based on trust and communication.
5. **Socialization Skills:** Through engage disengage training, dogs can develop better social skills, making them more comfortable around other animals and people.

Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Engage Disengage Training

Starting engage disengage training can be straightforward if approached with patience and consistency. Here's how to implement it effectively:

Step 1: Choose the Right Environment

Select a setting that is relatively free from distractions, such as your backyard or a quiet park. As your dog becomes more accustomed to the training, you can gradually introduce more challenging environments.

Step 2: Use Positive Reinforcement

Gather treats or toys that your dog loves. Positive reinforcement is key to encouraging desired behaviors.

Step 3: Introduce the 'Engage' Command

1. Start with a Cue: Use a specific word or phrase to signal to your dog that it is time to engage with their environment. This could be a simple "Look!" or "Go on!"
2. Encourage Exploration: Allow your dog to explore their surroundings after giving the cue. Watch for signs of engagement, such as sniffing or looking around.
3. Reward the Behavior: Once your dog engages with the environment, reward them with treats or praise. This helps them understand that engaging is a positive action.

Step 4: Introduce the 'Disengage' Command

1. Use a Different Cue: Choose a distinct command for disengagement, such as "Leave it!" or "Come back!"
2. Redirect Attention: When your dog is engaged with something, use the disengage command. If your dog responds by stopping the behavior and turning to you, reward them immediately.
3. Practice Regularly: Repetition is essential. Practice the disengage command in various situations to reinforce the behavior.

Step 5: Gradually Increase Distractions

Once your dog is comfortable with the engage and disengage commands, start introducing distractions:

1. Controlled Environments: Begin with mild distractions, such as a friend walking by or another dog at a distance.
2. Increase Difficulty: Gradually increase the level of distraction, ensuring your dog remains

focused on you. This helps them learn to disengage from more challenging stimuli.

Step 6: Generalize the Training

1. Different Locations: Practice the engage disengage commands in various locations, such as different parks, busy streets, or even at home.
2. Different Situations: Expose your dog to various scenarios that could trigger excitement or reactivity, reinforcing the commands in each context.

Common Challenges and Solutions

While engage disengage training can be effective, dog owners may face challenges along the way. Here are some common issues and how to address them:

Challenge 1: Lack of Interest

If your dog seems uninterested in engaging or disengaging, consider the following:

- Use Higher-Value Rewards: Experiment with different treats or toys to find something your dog truly loves.
- Shorten Sessions: Keep training sessions brief to maintain your dog's interest. Gradually increase the duration as they become more engaged.

Challenge 2: Overexcitement or Reactivity

If your dog becomes overly excited or reactive during training:

- Increase Distance: Start further away from the distraction and gradually decrease the distance as your dog becomes more comfortable.
- Use Calming Techniques: Implement techniques such as deep breathing or soothing tones to help your dog relax during training.

Challenge 3: Inconsistent Behavior

If your dog struggles with consistency:

- Practice Regularly: Ensure you practice the commands daily or several times a week.
- Stay Patient: Understand that learning takes time. Be patient with your dog and celebrate small successes.

Conclusion

Engage disengage training is a valuable tool for dog owners looking to improve their pets' behavior and strengthen their bond. By teaching dogs when to engage with their environment and when to disengage, owners can foster better impulse control, focus, and social skills. With consistent practice, positive reinforcement, and patience, both dogs and their owners can enjoy the benefits of this training method, leading to more enjoyable and fulfilling interactions.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is engage disengage training for dogs?

Engage disengage training is a technique that teaches dogs to focus on their handler by engaging with them and then disengaging to explore their environment, promoting self-control and attention.

What are the benefits of engage disengage training?

Benefits include improved focus and impulse control, reduced reactivity to distractions, and enhanced communication between the dog and handler.

How can I start engage disengage training with my dog?

Begin by using treats to encourage your dog to engage with you, then gradually introduce distractions to practice disengaging, rewarding them for returning their attention to you.

What breeds benefit most from engage disengage training?

All breeds can benefit, but high-energy and easily distracted dogs, such as herding or sporting breeds, often show significant improvements with this training.

How long should each training session last?

Training sessions should be kept short, around 5 to 10 minutes, to maintain the dog's interest and prevent frustration.

Can engage disengage training help with leash reactivity?

Yes, engage disengage training can significantly help with leash reactivity by teaching dogs to focus on their handler rather than on other stimuli while on walks.

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