

Watch Me

As a trainer, I feel the most important cue you can teach your dog is a "watch me". If your dog isn't paying attention to you, they can't do anything else that you ask of them. Watch me is my verbal cue to my dogs, but many of my students have cued their dog by saying: "watch", "look", "yes", or any other word they feel works best for them and their dog. Just as you would with every cue you teach your dog, teaching watch me works best when done in the least distracting environment and slowly working with the cue and your dog to be effective in highly distracting environments. To start the watch me cue, take a treat/toy, or something that your dog enjoys greatly, and hold it up to your eye and tell your dog "watch me". The split second your dog looks at the treat/toy, reward them. I like to "mark" my dogs and tell them "yes", when they make eye contact. When your dog is first learning this cue, they are looking at the treat not your eyes, but with practice, your dog will understand you are looking for eye contact. Once your dog understands that eye contact is to be made, you can work on sustaining the amount of time your dog is watching your eyes. Over time, you can fade, randomly reinforce, or provide verbal praise to your dog. Eventually, you will end up with a dog that gives you an "auto watch/checking in" where they automatically look at you. This is a wonderful cue to have to give your dog when they are in a stressful situation. I have an auto watch with my youngest dog. We have worked hard thru the past 2 years so that when we are on our daily walks and another dog approaches barking and lunging, he looks to me and says "I'm watching you and not responding back"! For this he is rewarded handsomely and since he is well paid, he would much prefer to watch me than pull on his leash or bark at the other dog.

Watch me is a valuable cue in so many ways. If you have a fearful or reactive dog, watch me is the gateway to changing the unwanted behavior, pulling, lunging, barking, hiding, etc., and giving your dog a more positive behavior to perform when they are stressed by something that is scary to them. When working with a dog that is stressed and reactive, I encourage students to pay attention to their dog and to reward their dogs when they start "checking in" with them without even being cued. I love to see this

happen with insecure dogs and how quickly their behavior changes with this simple but oh so important cue. Watch me also helps to create a bond with your dog and builds a relationship based on trust. So have your dog “watch me” and see how quickly this becomes the most important tool in your toolbox!

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Remember: Information is like a buffet, pick and choose what works for you and your dog.