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## Dog Care

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### Teaching Eye Contact

As primates, we humans are big on eye contact. We can't help but gaze into a cute dog's eyes (especially those of our own beloved pooches!), but eye contact is actually an unnatural behavior for canines. In fact, some dogs find eye contact downright intimidating! So in addition to its use as a communication tool, teaching your dog to make eye contact with people is a handy way to ensure that he'll feel comfortable when other human admirers look into his eyes.

- Begin in a quiet environment with few or no distractions. Hold a couple of small treats in your hands. The treats should be soft and easy for the dog to eat quickly. Your dog will very likely paw at your hands, mouth at your hands or bark at you. Be patient and wait him out. Keep watching his eyes. At most, just whisper his name once to see if he looks in the direction of your face. The instant his eyes shift up toward yours, say "Yes" and give him a treat from one of your hands. Continue to do this until the dog begins to "offer" looking at you. Assist him only by whispering his name once or twice. After that, wait him out and he eventually will look at you. Remember, you can't expect more than a fleeting glance at this point. Helpful hint: Do make sure you mix up which hand is giving him the treat.
- Once the dog understands to look at you in order to get the treat, ask for gradually longer periods of sustained eye contact. Start with a few seconds and try to build up to 20 seconds. It may help your dog if you smile and tell him he's good while he's gazing at you. If he looks away, say "Uh!" (not in a scolding tone, just conversational) and pull your hands behind your back. Immediately bring your hands back out front and resume waiting for voluntary eye contact. Maybe ask for slightly less than you'd hoped for last time, just to maintain your dog's confidence.
- Does your dog use a crate? Be sure to incorporate this exercise there, too. Put your hand on the latch, as though you are going to open the door, but don't do so until the dog looks at you. The instant he looks at you, say "Yes" and open the crate. You can also do this at the door if your dog likes to go out for walks. Looking at you gets the door opened!
- Add a cue so you can start to ask your dog for the eye contact behavior. Say "Look" or "Watch" before you look at him. If he looks away at any time, say "Uh! Look," and smile and praise when he looks back at you.
- Start holding other things your dog might want, like a toy. When he looks at you, say "Yes!" and throw the toy for him or offer him the toy for a game of tug.
- Hold your hands in various positions, whether you're holding treats or toys. Hold your dog's food bowl away from your body, say "Look" and wait for him to make eye contact before you put the food down. When your dog has the hang of it, try holding your hands closer to his face, or hold your palm open so the dog can see

the treat. Remember, he doesn't get the prize until he looks directly in your eyes.

Incorporate the eye contact games into various aspects of daily life. When your dog brings you a toy to play, ask that he make eye contact for five seconds before you play. If your dog wants to go say hello to another dog, ask that he sit and make eye contact with you for two seconds before you release him to play. When your dog wants a cookie from the cookie jar, ask for 20 seconds of eye contact first. Use your imagination! You'll find this is a very useful behavior when you are walking along a crowded city street or when you have your dog off-leash, but need his undivided attention for a moment. And it's especially useful when there's a neighborhood cat sitting on the lawn and you don't want your dog to see him!

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