

# Teacher's Pet Sessions

## Training Session 2 – Eye Contact – When, How and Why?

Pia Silvani: Hi. Welcome to *Teacher's Pet* on Pet Life Radio. This is Pia Silvani, director of training and behavior at St. Hubert's Animal Welfare Center in Madison New Jersey and your host. This week we'll be working on some impulse control exercises to teach your dog to check in with you before he does anything. This is critical, can be a lifesaver. I like to call this "May I". Eye contact from your dog is a way for your dog to ask permission to do something. The second exercise we're going to work on is getting reliability when you say your dog's name. How many of you say your dogs name over and over and over again and there's absolutely no response? He might give you a quick little head turn; he might not even turn his head at all. Sometimes you think the dog changed his name and never told you. So when you think about it from a human standpoint, if you were to say my name and I didn't turn around to look at you, you would probably become quite insulted, you would think I was rude, you might not think that I heard you, so you might say it louder. If I still didn't turn you'd probably come over to me and say, "Is there a problem?" Well our expectations should be the exact same with our dog. When you say the dog's name, obviously the dog should not quickly glance at you, but he should look into your eyes. And the third exercise we're going to do today is dealing with your dog's leash. The leash is there for safety, not as a means of control. So many people, the biggest complaint that I get, when they take the dogs leash off the dog bolts, the dog runs away, okay. So we're going to work on an exercise to teach a dog to stay with you regardless of whether or not you had that leash on. So before we begin our training session, if you don't have your dog, treats, a tug toy and a leash, now's the time to go get it. We'll take a short break, and when we return get ready to have some fun.

Pia Silvani: Hi, welcome back. This is Pia Silvani, host of *Teacher's Pet* on Pet Life Radio. Thanks for joining us. Today we're going to start working on eye contact first. Hopefully your dog is ready and we've got a hungry dog and you've got your tug toy, and to teach you now how to use your tug toy as a reward. If you haven't taught your dog, please refer back to the prior shows on teaching your dog to tug. Now what I'd like you to do is to have your treats not on your body, not on your person, but off to the side next to you. You can put them on a desk, on the table; they can be in a little plastic bag. But make sure that they're not in your pockets or you're not holding them in your hands at this particular time. What you're going to do is you're just going to walk around the room. The second your dog makes eye contact with you, I don't want you to say anything, I just want you to walk around the room very slowly. So what I'm doing right now with Gwinny is I'm walking around the room, and what she's doing is she knows this exercise so I can't fake her out, but she's staring at me at this point, she's watching every move that I make. So I'm going to have a seat right now, and what you're going to do, I'm going to talk you through it... What you're going to do, you're going to wait for your dog to make direct eye-to-eye contact with you. The second he does, I want you to say "Yes", remember that's our verbal marker that means what you just did is correct and my contract is to give you a reward. Follow it by a treat. So again, a reminder, the second your dog makes eye contact with you, say "Yes", give a treat. It's funny right now, you can see my powerful marker because I just said "Yes" and both of my dogs happened to

look up at me waiting for some kind of reward, so obviously they know that word is positive. All right, continue to walk around the room. Now if your dog is just staring at you and you can't seem to get away from your dog, here's a little trick; what I want you to do is wait for the eye contact, the second your dog looks at you I want you to say "Yes" and toss the treat away from you so he has to look away, and give it a good six foot toss if you can. Now if he looks back, eye-to-eye, mark it with a "Yes", go get a treat and toss it away again. So you're going to do this several times. So the key now is you want the dog to start to check in with you further and further away. So this is what I call rewarding free attention. If you do this often and in many different environments, the result is going to be that your dog will start to check in with you. So say for example you're going to take your dog out to the backyard. What I would do is I would take his favorite toy, I would take out some treats, stick them in my pocket, every single time my dog turned around and looked into my eyes without me asking for it, so it's a free check in, tell him "Yes" and toss him a treat. You can do this when you're taking your dog for a walk. If you're walking down the street and all of a sudden your dog turns to take a look to see where you're at, tell him "Yes" and reward him with a treat. Again, when you're on walks you don't obviously want to continually give so many treats where the dog is becoming overweight. I've used treats for many, many years, 15 years in training, and my dogs have always been thin. Remember the key behind it is small, but palatable.

But when you're at home I might use his kibble, so instead of feeding him his one cup of food if that's what you feed in the morning in his bowl for free, put that one cup in a little baggie and save it for when you're working with your dog. So perhaps you're taking him out in the backyard for a half hour break and you're going to do a little bit of playing, a little bit of training, you're just walking around, take that cup of food with you. Or if you're going on a walk, put that cup of food in your pocket. This way you can reward with his kibble so he's working for his food, so he's not getting those extra calories. But if you are obviously using cheese or your turkey or the steak, whatever your dog likes, remember it's about the full caloric intake over the entire course of the day. It's not just about he needs his full cup of food. He might need to cut back a little bit on his food if your giving extra treats that day. So again, homework assignment for this free check in will be to any time your dog turns to look at you, it's "Yes" and he's rewarded with food. Your goal is to get great distance away from your dog, so you want to have further distance. If you toss the treat further out, see how far you can toss it out, maybe fifteen feet out. Or say your dog is just sniffing in the backyard and he's on the opposite side of the yard, and he just happens to turn to look at you, a really bright "YES!", and he should come running if he understands what "Yes" means, he should come running back to you for a reward.

Pia Silvani: We just worked a little bit on free attention. Now what we're going to do is we're going to work on teaching your dog his name. Basically many people say, "Well my dog knows what his name is", but he was not born knowing what his name is. Think of his name as a queue for another behavior. I don't particular like to call them commands per se, 'cause when we call behaviors commands people tend to say it in a commanding voice. So my preference is to call it a queue. So what we do is we have a particular word that's a queue that's paired up with a particular behavior. So in this case, when you say your dog's name, the behavior that you're going to be looking for is eye contact. This is probably the biggest foundation for everything that you're going to teach in the future. If your dog is not paying attention or the dog does not turn and look at you when you say his name, I could probably be that your dog's not going to respond to the next queue that you give him. So we're going to start off first, you can warm up a little bit with some free attention if you'd like and if you feel like your dog was successful in that.

We're going to start off now, I want you to take two treats in your hand, and again, you're not going to say anything at this time. I will tell you when to say your dog's name. So I want two treats, one in each hand, held between your thumb and your forefinger. You're going to hold the treats somewhere, bend your elbows, keep your elbows close to your body, and hold the treats probably on each side near your ears, somewhere near your ears.

Not right next to your ears, but close enough so you're about six inches away from your ears. Now what you're going to do is, your dog can be sitting in front of you, your dog can be standing in front of you. If he's jumping up on you to get the treats, just take a step backwards so he falls to the ground. Again, say nothing, but look at your dog. If he's checking in and he's looking at the treats, you're going to say absolutely nothing. The second your dog makes eye contact with you, say "Yes" and deliver one of those treats to the dog, and then refill so you'll always have two treats in your hand at any given moment. So again, take your hands, put them up again near your ears, somewhere near your ears and just wait your dog out. He should, if he glances back and forth to the food, don't move it, just be patient, wait for him to look into your eyes, the second he does, tell him "Yes" and deliver the food treat. Now I want you to deliver the food treat from each hand. So maybe you're going to deliver the treat one time from your right hand and then the next time from your left hand, maybe the next time from your left hand and then back to your right hands. Your dog never really knows which hand he's getting the food from. Now what we're doing is we're really using this as a distraction at this point. So the dog has to learn that I've got something good for you, you've got to figure out how to get it, so you've got to work.

This takes some patience. Again, I don't want you saying your dogs name at this time. All right, now once you have accomplished that, what I'd like you to do, we're going to move on now to the next step. Once your dog is consistently, when you start to put the food up, looking right into your eyes, what you're going to do now is you're going to get your dog to look away. So just like you did with the first exercise, the second he looks at you tell him "Yes" and now toss the treat away so he has to go to fetch it. Refill, so you have two treats, one in each hand. If he comes back to you and he looks immediately into your eyes tell him "Yes" and toss the treat in the other direction. You don't need to say "Take it" or "Find it", you're just tossing the treat after the "Yes". Refill, do it again, the second he looks at you say "Yes", toss in another direction, perhaps a little bit further away. Say he's six feet away and he turns immediately to look at you and you've got eye contact now from six feet away, tell him "Yes" from six feet away, toss it in the other direction so he's got to run to get it. This is going to turn into a fun game now. Now the dog is starting to figure out, "Wow, if I just look at my owner, I get rewarded. So wherever I am, I need to turn and look, face my owner, look directly into his or her eyes, and then I get a reward." If you're getting consistency with this and you know, I always say if you can bet your bank account that the dog is going to do it, that's the time that you put the queue on, and in this particular case the queue is your dogs name. So if you can bet your bank account, only if you can bet your bank account, now you'll say your dog's name. So what you'll do is you'll wait for eye contact, say "Yes", toss the treat, and right when the dog's about to turn to look at you say "Buddy", obviously your dog's name, you're not going to say "Buddy", but you're going to say your dogs name, whatever your dog's name is.

The second he looks at you, after you've said his name, say "Yes", toss the treat away. When he retrieves it, he's just about to turn to look, say his name, the second he looks

mark it with a “Yes” and toss the treat in the other direction again. If he’s getting good at the game, what you could do now is don’t wait for him to start to turn, say his name right after he’s picked up the treat. So now his head is down on the ground; if he spins his head around and looks into your eyes when you say his name, “Yes”, toss the treat in the direction, and again, when his nose is down to the ground, he’s picking up that treat, say his name quickly, again if he looks, “Yes” and toss the treat. If he does not make eye contact, do not repeat the dog’s name, okay. That is critical. You don’t want to be saying, for example his name is Buddy, “Buddy, Buddy, Buddy”. That’s not going to help. You need the reliability. You only say the dog’s name one time, and then encourage him. Wait him out instead. That would be my preference, to wait him out, okay. If you’re getting lots of work with this, what you can also do now is this time instead of giving him the treat, toss, say his name and immediately say “Yes” and start a tug game. So lets give him a little bit of a play break here and remember the rules of tug. “Take it”, tugging, praising, and when you’re ready tell him to either “Give” or “Release”. Maybe throw in a ‘sit’, maybe say his name again, if he looks at you tell him “Yes”, and start your tug game again. Excellent.

Pia Silvani: All right, now lets go over what your homework is. So your homework for this will be, it’s easy to do in a particular room where there are no distractions around. You may need to start from scratch each time you do this. So if you’re going to go out into the backyard, go to the deck, go on your patio, you may need to start with your treats just like you did inside, two treats near your ears and then toss it into the grass. Once your dog is getting the concept of it, okay, you might want to do this on your walk. Again, you don’t need the food treats up by your head initially because the dog is getting the concept. What I might do is when you think the dog might turn around to look at you for some reason, say his name, mark it with a “Yes” and give him a couple pieces of his kibble on the walk. Once he’s getting really, really good at it, then you can try to save his name off of a distraction. So for example, maybe he’s in the backyard sniffing the deer that were out there last night, or he, maybe there was another animal, a chipmunk, okay. So he’s sniffing the ground, okay. Say his name, happy tone of voice, okay. So I don’t want you to say it in a firm tone of voice, say it in a nice happy tone of voice. If you think he possibly didn’t hear or the distraction was too hard, simply change the tone of your voice. So for example, lets again say my dog’s name is Buddy. I’m going to say, “Buddy”, and if he didn’t turn and look, I’m going to change my tone, “Buddy.” So that’s not repeating it, that’s helping him out. But you don’t want to say, “Buddy, Buddy, Buddy, Buddy.” As you can hear it all sounds the same. So that’s going to be repetitive. If you repeat it, it’s only going to teach the dog basically to ignore you, not to turn to look. Lastly, don’t ever pair up your dog’s name with something negative. It should always be paired up with something positive. So if you’re frustrated at your dog, the worst thing that you could do is shout his name in an angry tone of voice, “Buddy.” Who wants to hear that? Think about when you were a child, you always knew when you were in trouble when your mom or dad said your name, “Pia”, in an angry tone. You though, “Uh oh, that tone doesn’t sound very friendly.” So do you think your dog wants to turn to look? And if you say your dog’s name, what is your expectation? Your expectation should be that the dog turn and look at you, okay. Don’t settle for a quick glance. I would not settle for him ignoring you. If he does ignore you, my preference would be is that you go and get him, okay, and practice again in distracting areas.

Pia Silvani: Alrighty. Take another little short break. Give him a tug break, and then we’re going to go on to our last exercise. Remember again; tell him to take it and tug, tug, tug. Good, praise him, praise him, praise him. Remember; don’t elevate him off the ground.

You don't want to be doing that. It can hurt his neck, it can hurt his spine, so keep it head level, okay. And now lets see without holding collar, without giving food, you should at this point be able to do a "Give" or say "Release" and your dog immediately spits it out. If he does, you start the game all over again. So actually the reward is the game starts. When you finish the game, put your tug toy away, don't leave it on the ground, put it up on the desk, and again, you'll use it as another reward. So when you're out on your walks you might want to take a tug toy with you. Once the dog is pretty savvy about tugging, you can basically pick up anything and he can tug on that.

Pia Silvani: All right, lets work a little bit now on getting your dog to realize when the leash comes off that is not time to run away. So what I'd like you to do now is put your dogs leash on and stand somewhere near your, where your little pile of treats are and get your dog to sit. Now that your dog is sitting I want you to take hold of the bolt of the leash, and I want you just to give it a little click, a little snap as if you're going to take it off, okay. As you do that, it should be "Click", making a little click sound with the bolt of your leash, okay. And I'm doing that right now with my leash, and I'm immediately following it with a treat to the dog. Now I'm not taking it off, I'm just snapping it so the dog thinks I'm taking it off. Again you're going to make that little click sound, and you're going to follow it with a treat. Click sound, follow it with a treat. Click sound, follow it with a treat. Do it two or three more times, and then on the fourth time what I'd want you to do is click and take it off, very gently, give the dog a treat and put the leash back on. All right, lets try that again. This time I want you to click twice, and on the third time I want you to take the leash off and follow it by a treat. And when you're done with that, put the leash back on. And this time what I want you to do is take the leash off and immediately follow it by a treat. Put the leash back on. All right, this time when you take the leash off, what I'd like you to do, and see if your dog has figured out this, the games that you've been playing here... This time I want you to take your leash off and I want you to toss the treat, maybe three feet away, see if your dog comes back to you. If he comes back to you, tell him "Yes", put the leash back on, then give him a treat. All right, let's try that again. Unclick, leash off, toss the treat, if he comes back to you, he looks back, tell him "Yes", put the leash on before you give him a treat, so he knows, understands now that he's beginning to get the idea of "Let me just wait at this point until I might end up getting a treat when that leash comes off.

But when the leash gets put on, I also get rewarded for it." Good. Now what I'd like you to do, again, take it off and tug with him. Get a little tug game in there. Once you've asked him to release or "Give", put the leash back on and reward him for a treat. Okay, lets try that again. Leash comes off and tug. Once you've asked for your release or your give, put the leash back on and maybe tug now, instead of a treat. All right, you're going to expand upon this a little bit now. This time what you're going to do, I'll explain it first and then you can do it, you're going to take the leash off, and what I want you to do is run into another room, and you have the leash in your hand and possibly your tug toy or treat. Your dog should always chase you, never chase your dog. Think about this as Follow The Leader. I want my dog always to think when I run away, no matter where I'm going, if he catches up with me good things happen. And that can be a lifesaver for your dog, especially when you're working on a recall. If you're working on getting your dog to come to you and he doesn't, if you run away and the dog has had a positive association with chasing after you and then getting rewarded, he might come off of something and it could save his life.

So, again a reminder, what you're going to do is you're going to take the leash off, you're going to run into another room, the second your dog catches up with you, tell him "Yes", put the leash back on, then reward him. Okay, why don't you go try that, and then come on back? All right. Now, what your homework is for this, your homework on this will be not only again doing in the house, doing in the house is going to be the easy part, it's outdoors. So I want you to start in a safe area, so a fenced in area of some sort where you know that your dog will not take off on you, or if you don't have a fenced in area, what you can do is you can purchase a thirty-foot long line, it's like a long leash that's dragging on the ground and then practice your leash work, and if the dog all of a sudden bolts, just step on the long line so he can't take off. So this should be a good exercise to work on. Again, sometimes even if you have a double leash, you might have a long leash on your walks, okay, and then take your leash off, what does your dog do? If you take him to the park and you take your leash off, what does your dog do? Your dog should wait for you to say, "Okay, go free, go play. Permission granted to move away from me." That's critical. Absolutely critical that your dog start to look to you for permission. So the more you reward check ins, free check ins, the more you reward eye contact when you say his name, and the more frequently that you reward eye contact after the leash is on and rewarding once the leash is put back on, your dog will want to stick with you. And when you go hiking with your dog, he'll probably start to check in, and, because again, once again, it's a habit. You're making this into a habit that the dog learns. So many of my student say to me your dogs stare at you all the time, no matter where you are they're always watching, and the reason being is that if they watch something good happens. Something fun will happen if you pay attention, so they're always glancing. So if I'm walking away, yesterday I was gardening outside, so my dogs were hanging around and they were laying there with their Frisbees, their favorite toy, and they never knew when I might come over and toss that Frisbee for them, so they're going to keep a close watch. So you might want to leave your play toys outside in the backyard, so if you're doing some gardening or you're watering your flowers now in the Summer, okay, now is the time when all of a sudden maybe your dog might bring the ball over, good, tell him to sit, "Good boy for checking in", and then toss the ball.

Pia Silvani: Okay, unfortunately we're out of time. If you want more information on any of the topics, I've, as you know, I've written six training manuals, which are available for sale at St. Hubert's Dog Training School. What you can do is email our office manager, Tracy Hofer, at [thofer](mailto:thofer@sthuberts.org), that's t-h-o-f-e-r, @sthuberts, s-t-h-u-b-e-r-t-s, dot org, o-r-g ([thofer@sthuberts.org](mailto:thofer@sthuberts.org)) and ask for a basic training manual. So please visit us again. A special thank you to our producers for making this show happen. Please go to [petliferadio.com](http://petliferadio.com) and click on *Teacher's Pet*. Also, if you have any questions with regard to anything you did on any of the training shows, if you have any comments, if you have ideas for other shows, or if you'd like to teach your dog something, please email me at [pia](mailto:pia@petliferadio.com), p-i-a, @petliferadio.com ([pia@petliferadio.com](mailto:pia@petliferadio.com)). So until next time, this is Pia signing off. Thank you for your interest in Pet Life Radio. Take care.

© Copyright 2009 PetLifeRadio, LLC

No part of this transcript may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without the written permission of Pet Life Radio.