

Controlled Distractions

What is a Controlled Distraction

Controlled distractions are a core concept in dog training. They allow dogs to learn focus, self-control, and reliability in the presence of stimuli that would normally pull their attention away. By carefully managing the level and timing of distractions, you can set dogs up for success, rather than frustration.

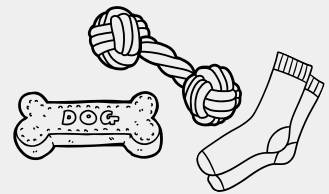
- A stimulus in the dog's environment that is intentionally introduced in a manageable way.
- Predictable and adjustable in intensity, distance, and timing.
- Allows the dog to perform the desired behavior despite the presence of distractions.
- Gradually increased in difficulty to build reliability and confidence.

Key Principles

- **Predictable and Controllable:** Only introduce distractions you can manage and adjust based on your dog's skill level.
- **Success-Oriented:** Always set the dog up to succeed. Avoid overwhelming situations that lead to frustration.
- **Incremental Exposure:** Start with low-intensity distractions and gradually increase complexity through increasing the value.
- **Purposeful Use:** Each distraction should teach the dog to maintain focus, self-control, and make good choices.

Examples

- Toys or objects in the room.
- Food in a dish or on a countertop.
- Dogs or animals behind a fence or tethered.
- Walking near other dogs at a distance where your dog can still focus on you.
- Mild environmental noises like a vacuum or doorbell, gradually increasing volume or proximity.
- People moving in the background.
- Weather Changes.
- A friend who is good at listening to direction.



Exercises Around Distractions

Move the Dog Around the Distraction

Purpose:

Teaches your dog to remain calm and focused while moving through the presence of a distraction. This helps the dog generalize self-control to new environments while moving.

Set Up

- **Choose a controlled distraction:** a quiet toy, another dog at a distance, a person moving slowly, or a mild environmental sound.
- **Have your dog on a leash or in a controlled space:** Your dog shouldn't be able to reach the distraction if they mess up (fenced yard, training pen).

Step By Step

1. **Start at a Distance:** Begin far enough from the distraction that your dog notices it but remains calm.
2. **Move Your Dog:** Walk your dog past or around the distraction using a loose leash or guiding cues.
3. **Mark and Reward:** If the dog passes calmly or performs the behavior, immediately mark (duration marker) and reward.
4. **Increase Difficulty Gradually:** Slowly reduce the distance between the dog and the distraction, or increase the intensity of the distraction.
5. **Vary the Path:** Change the route, speed, or angles you move your dog around the distraction to prevent predictability.

Key Points

- **Keep sessions short and positive.**
- **End on a successful note to build confidence.**
- **Only increase difficulty when your dog succeeds consistently at the current level.**

Exercises Around Distractions

Move the Distraction Around the Dog

Purpose:

Helps the dog learn to maintain focus while the source of excitement or stress moves around them, building impulse control and reliability.

Set Up

- **Choose a controlled distraction:** a quiet toy, another dog at a distance, a person moving slowly, or a mild environmental sound.
- **Start with your dog in a stationary position:** on their bed, sit, down, or stand.

Step By Step

1. **Start Far Away:** Begin far enough from the distraction that your dog notices it but remains calm.
2. **Circle or Approach:** The distraction can move around the dog, or toward and then away, without touching or interacting directly.
3. **Mark Calm Behavior:** If the dog stays in position or maintains focus, immediately mark (duration marker) and reward.
4. **Increase Complexity Gradually:** Reduce distance, increase speed, or add mild movement to the distraction while ensuring the dog remains successful.
5. **Vary the Scenario:** Move distractions unpredictably, to different heights, change direction, or add multiple distractions over time.

Key Points

- **Keep sessions short and positive.**
- **End on a successful note to build confidence.**
- **Only increase difficulty when your dog succeeds consistently at the current level.**