

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

1



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.

2



At the precise moment your dog ENGAGES by looking at the trigger, CLICK!

3



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

1



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.

2



At the precise moment your dog DISENGAGES by looking away from the trigger, CLICK!

3



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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