RESOURCES

🌎 Training Around Distractions

Our dogs live in a world full of distractions – things that move, things that smell, things that look strange, and things that make noise. The list goes on.

To teach your dog that distractions are just background noise, you first need to understand what distracts your dog and the intensity of those distractions. Why is this important? Distractions lower your dog's ability to focus, making it harder for them to make good choices. For the handler, this can become quite frustrating.

By knowing your dog's distractions and their level of intensity, you can work through them strategically and better gauge your dog's emotional state. I'm sure everyone has been in a dog training class where suddenly your dog couldn't perform a simple sit – something they do perfectly at home. This happens because high distraction levels can overwhelm a dog, making it hard for them to think clearly.

The more we understand this, the better we can help them by first teaching foundational skills in a low-distracting environment, then gradually adding more layers of distraction.

This approach will lead to more relaxed walks and a dog that is focused and attentive.

There are 4 categories that will make it easier for you to determine a distraction:

1. Value – What value does the distraction have for your dog? Rate each distraction in your distraction list from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).
2. Distance – How far or how close does your dog need to be for "the thing" to become a distraction. The value of the distraction may change with distance.
3. Senses Engaged – Which senses does the distraction engage in your dog? Does it involve sound, sight, or smell.
4. Movement - Is the distraction moving, or stationary?

Other important considerations include the environment. For example, a leaf lying in your garage may not be a distraction, but when that same leaf is outside, moving slightly in the wind, it could suddenly become a distraction.

©Not to be re-printed without the written permission of Anke's Dog Training. Copyright 2024

RESOURCES

Some dogs can also be easily distracted by shapes or unfamiliar objects. Take your time creating your list and carefully observe how your dog interacts with their environment.

There might be distractions that you can also use as rewards, like the cookie on the floor that you placed, the toy on the ground (placed by you), or the lake that beckons for a swim.

Remember to always start introducing a new game in a low-distraction environment, so we can reward our dog for making the right choice. It wouldn't be fair to start at a bunny farm and expect them to focus and walk nicely on a leash.

Build your dog's knowledge and confidence step by step, one layer at a time. Only introduce another distraction (or increase difficulty) once you see your dog has a solid understanding of the behaviour in a distraction-free environment.

Remember, we always want to control the environment, not the dog!

Use the "Your Dog's Distraction List" to keep track of all the distractions you're already aware off and add more as you encounter them. You can find this list in the course material.

©Not to be re-printed without the written permission of Anke's Dog Training. Copyright 2024