

Dog Squirrel-Distraction Training Checklist

Preparation

- Leash & Harness
Use a sturdy 6-foot leash (avoid retractables) and a secure harness or collar to keep control.
- Treats & Tools
Gather your dog's favorite high-value treats (small pieces of chicken, cheese, freeze-dried liver) and a clicker if you use one.
- Mindset
Patience is key, progress may take weeks to months depending on your dog's prey drive.

Training Steps

1. Weeks 1-2: Build focus
Practice the "Look at Me" command in a quiet place until your dog reliably makes eye contact.
2. Weeks 3-4: Introduce "Leave It"
Use a closed fist with a boring treat. Reward your dog for backing off and eventually for obeying "leave it" with treats on the floor.
3. Week 5: Loose leash walking
Start walking with your dog in a low-distraction environment to reinforce good walking behavior.
4. Week 6-8: Controlled exposure at distance
Find a place with squirrels. At a distance where your dog notices squirrels but stays calm, say "Look at me" and reward immediately.
5. Weekly: Gradually close distance to squirrels
Move a few feet closer each session only if your dog remains calm. If your dog lunges or gets excited, move farther away and reset.
6. Ongoing: Introduce alternate rewards
Use a special toy or playtime if your dog prefers it over treats.
7. Regularly refresh commands
Practice "Look at Me" and "Leave It" daily, even without squirrels present.

8. Log your progress

Note successes and setbacks to adjust training pace accordingly.

Tips for Success

- Never punish your dog for chasing instincts, reward calm behavior instead.
- Be consistent, short, frequent sessions work better than long, infrequent ones.
- Involve everyone, your family and dog walkers must follow training plans.
- Celebrate wins! Reward whenever your dog chooses you over the squirrel.