



## Lincoln Land Animal Clinic, Ltd.

Animal Behavior Services

Colleen S. Koch, DVM

1150 Tendick St.

Jacksonville, IL 62650

217-245-9508

[www.lincolnlandac.com](http://www.lincolnlandac.com)

[llanimalclinic@yahoo.com](mailto:llanimalclinic@yahoo.com)

## Teaching Focus

---

**Lesson description: Teach** your pet to give eye contact in response to their name or other cue (such as “focus” or “watch”). This cue is very useful for teaching your pet to be attentive to you. It lays an important foundation for keeping your pet focused in “real life” situations.

**Learning goals:** You will see how a high rate of reinforcement enables you to keep your pet’s attention. Your pet will learn that being attentive always pays! You will also learn that observing carefully (clicking the instant your pet makes contact with your eyes) and raising criteria slowly help set up your pet for success.

### Training plan:

- 1) Capture your pet making eye contact and add a cue, the pet’s name/ or cue word.
  - a) To capture a behavior patiently wait for your pet to do the behavior then click and treat (c/t)
    - i) Your pet may just give a quick glance at first
  - b) Continue to c/t whenever your pet makes eye contact.
  - c) If your pet is clicker savvy they will quickly realize that eye contact is the behavior that is being rewarded.
  - d) Increase the duration of eye contact
  - e) Just prior to your pet making eye contact, give the cue (pet’s name or other word), then c/t when they make eye contact. Repeat\*\* .
  - f) Test in different locations within the house.
- 2) Practice in the presence of mild distractions.
  - a) Practice saying the cue when you are moving an arm, leg, scratching etc.
    - i) Gradually increase the distraction.
      - (1) you should be able to hold food in your hand with your arm extended out to the side, while jumping up and down and your pet’s eyes are still glued to yours.
    - ii) If your pet is not successful, then you have increased the distraction too quickly. Return to step 1f until your pet is successful in many different locations without any distractions.
- 3) Add other activities so the pet does not maintain constant eye contact, but responds quickly to the cue.
  - a) Throw a ball, ask for your pet to heel, down, sit etc, and then give cue. Your pet should quickly turn and give eye contact.

- b) Just as in step 3, start slow with mild distractions and gradually increase the duration of the distraction, then increase the intensity of the distraction. Use highly rewarding treats any time you increase the duration or intensity of the distraction.

**Things to consider:**

- \*\*Repeat each session 3 times. Continue to repeat throughout the day or at meal/treat times. Repeat each step in each location, or with each distraction for as long as it takes for your pet to whip their head around when you say the cue word. There should be no hesitation, nervousness or apprehension.
- Some pets may be distracted and unable to focus on their handler.
  - Remember to decrease the expectations, then start at a point of success
  - Go to a quieter environment and increase the value of the treats
  - Make the area as small and secluded as possible
- At what point should you begin using the cue?
  - When your pet is performing the behavior 80% of the time
- What if your pet does not make eye contact when you give the cue?
  - Use a toy or move, be more motivating so your pet wants to look at you. Move around, whistle etc
- If you are losing your pet's attention due to a low rate of reinforcement, what should you do?
  - Add in another behavior that the pet knows well, to increase the rate of reinforcement.
- If your pet sits and stares at you and will not look away you should try:
  - Throwing treats to the ground to reset the pet (breaks eye contact)
  - Move around
  - Ask for other behaviors (sit, down etc) in between saying the "focus" cue. When your pet does these behaviors you can c/t then throw the treat away from you or to the floor to break the eye contact.