

Dog: 180-Turn Command



Benefit

Teaching your dog to turn 180 degrees on command allows you to turn him away from things that might make him react negatively.

After your dog has learned this command, you can apply this exercise to things (people or objects) that trigger a negative reaction in your dog. Then you gradually decrease the distance to the trigger before turning. Note: you always turn *before* your dog reacts.

What You Need

- High-value treats like chicken or cheese, or a favorite toy.
- Gentle leader is best, but you can use a front-buckle harness.
- A clicker, if you use one. Otherwise, say “yes!” to mark the behavior.
- A quiet area without distractions for practicing.
- 10 minutes 2–3 times daily.

Prerequisites

Your dog needs to be able to walk easily on leash.

How to Train It

Step 1: With your dog moving at your left side, place the treat or toy right in front of your dog’s nose and gently turn to the right. Your dog must travel farther to keep up with the treat in your hand. Encourage your dog with your voice to speed up a bit. Move through the turn and then walk straight.

Before you start the turn, say “turn,” then praise and treat your dog to make him associate the command with good things. We will need that positive emotional response later when we introduce it in the presence of the trigger.

Step 2: Repeat Step 1 several times. After a few turns, place the treat or toy a few inches ahead of your dog’s nose, but make sure your dog focuses on your hands or the toy. You should practice this exercise at home without distraction first. When your dog is reliably turning on command and expecting a reward right after the turn, start to practice the command on your walks *without* the trigger present.

When your dog turns effortlessly on your walks without the trigger present, you’re ready for the next step.

Step 3: At first sight of the trigger and *before* your dog is reacting, turn away from the trigger. For example, if your dog normally reacts to a trigger when he’s 15 feet away from it, start the turn at 20 feet and only gradually reduce the distance over several trials. Once your dog responds consistently, move on to the next step.

Step 4: Over time, the distance between you and the trigger will get shorter and shorter. You will begin to notice your dog looking at the trigger and then looking at you or your hand, expecting a turn command and the positive outcome. The exercise has changed your dog’s emotional response to the trigger—and has changed his behavior in the process.

Dog: 180-Turn Command *(continued)*

When you can walk right by the trigger and your dog looks at you the entire time, you know you're doing well. Give your dog an extra special reward for passing the trigger!

Tips and Pitfalls

- Every time your dog reacts badly to the trigger (i.e. threaten it), he's practicing and inadvertently reinforcing his own behavior.
- Don't use choke or chain collars. These collars create negative and painful associations that can worsen your dog's already negative association with, and reaction to, the trigger.
- Always turn *before* your dog reacts. Watch your dog closely for early signs and turn immediately if you notice them.
- Reward every turn completion with a treat or toy.
- Keep sessions short and fun and end them on a good note. Give your dog time to learn the individual steps. If he shows any aggression toward you when practicing these exercises, immediately stop the exercise and contact a professional.