

DROP IT!

The following article is taken from Dr. Ian Dunbar's *DROP IT Behavior Blueprint*.

If your dog does not know this command, it is a good time to teach it to them. The 'drop it' command can be very beneficial to you and your four-legged garbage disposal. Or your furry laundry thief. While you may find it amusing that they are stealing items of intimate apparel, or the dishrag from on top of the counter in your kitchen, it is not in their eyes a game, but a dominance display. More can be discussed about that in a consultation with me, but for now let's teach Spot to 'drop it'!

I'd begin by taking them in the back yard or the park and get a sturdy stick like object or stick. If Spot likes to fetch the stick all the better. If not, try one of their most prized toys. Do not start this off with a food item or treat such as a pig's ear or cow hoof. First get them interested in taking this item into their mouth. Then as usual, relinquishing this item becomes a battle. Make this more controlled for yourself by having them already on lead. This way they cannot run too far away if they pull it from your hands. Have them take the object in their mouth, then say drop it, and tug it back out. Do not rip it out but calmly try to pull it out. If they do not release it, take your free hand and place your thumb and forefinger on either side of their jaw at the hinge in the back, squeeze your fingers in like you are pinching either side of the jaw hinge, or prying the hinge a little further open. The dog should open their mouth a little in order for you to take the object out. Saying 'drop it' again as you are removing it, then praise with something really yummy and some physical display of affection. Then repeat. Do this a few times, then just forget it. Try this again in the next day or so. Within a short period of time your dog will just drop it when told. Once you've accomplished this, up the stakes a little. Try that dish towel, or underwear your dogs likes to get and run with, put it in their mouth, then say 'drop it' and if they don't do the jaw-hinge-pinch and try it again!

For practical purposes, you should understand how handy this command can be. You can get your dogs to drop anything. But you must be diligent. How bad would you feel if your dog swallowed something rather than getting them to drop it for something more enjoyable? You must show them that dropping the item, no matter what it is what you want and it will be rewarded. Often dogs who are mistaught this 'drop it', will, once out of reach, hear the 'drop it' command and swallow down whatever it was that was in their mouth, even if they may have not wanted to actually eat it in the first place. So be careful.