# Training Default Attention Behaviors

**Default Attention Behavior – Step 1**

When a puppy is distracted, frustrated, confused, or overly excited, the very best thing to teach them is to turn their attention to their handler instead of reacting to their emotional state. Once you have loaded the clicker with your puppy, you can begin teaching a default attention behavior.

**Preparation**

You will need:
- A pouch of puppy kibble
- A clicker
- A puppy on leash
- A non-distracting environment

**Process**

1. Begin by warming your puppy up with a quick clicker loading exercise. Feed three kibbles using the same steps outlined in the Clicker Loading Protocol.

2. For the next kibble, wait until your puppy gives you brief eye contact before clicking.

3. Continue clicking and treating for eye contact 10 times.

4. Then, change your position. Stand up if you were sitting down or sit down if you were standing up. Repeat for another 10 kibbles.

5. Take a short break (2-3 minutes) and repeat 10 times in a different position (kneeling on the ground, sitting in a chair, etc.)

6. The key is to reinforce calm eye contact rather than excited jumping, demand barking, or other behaviors in tandem with the eye contact. You may have to wait until the puppy has calmed down before continuing the session and work on capturing calm eye contact with the clicker.

7. Once your puppy is repeatedly offering calm eye contact in a low-distraction environment, move to Step 2. This may take several sessions over the course of a few days.

**Default Attention Behavior – Step 2**

Step 2 of the Default Attention Behavior Protocol prepares your puppy to use the behavior of eye contact around distractions. You will want to slowly introduce distractions in order to set your puppy up for success, but with patience and practice, your puppy should be offering you eye contact consistently in all situations.

**Preparation**

You will need:
- A pouch of puppy kibble
- A clicker
- A puppy on leash
- Several types of distractions varying in level of intensity.
    o Examples of low distraction items include stuffed animals that the puppy isn't allowed to play with, a pile of treats on the ground, or a tennis ball rolling slowly by.
    o Examples of high distraction items are other dogs on-leash, children playing and running, and prey animals like squirrels and rabbits.
    o An example of a low distraction environment is a familiar room in your home, or your backyard on a quiet morning.
    o An example of a high distraction environment is an outdoor park or playground.

**Process**

1. Begin by warming your puppy up with a quick round of Default Attention Behavior - Step 1. Feed five kibbles using the same steps outlined in the Default Attention Behavior – Step 1 Protocol on Pg. 3.

2. For the next kibble, have a helper introduce a low distraction item to the environment. The puppy is allowed to look at the item, but it is important that the puppy does not get to it. If the puppy gets up to investigate, continue holding the leash so that the puppy cannot reach the item. Eventually, he will turn to look back at you. Click at that moment and reward.

3. If your puppy is having a hard time disengaging from the distraction, have your helper remove it and return to Default Attention Behavior – Step 1 for the remainder of the session. Choose a less distracting item for the next time.

4. Continue clicking and treating for eye contact 10 times in the presence of the distraction. It is important that the puppy never gets access to the distraction during the training session. Once you've completed 10 clicks/treats, have your helper remove the distraction, or encourage your puppy to walk away and contain him while you remove the distraction yourself.

5.  Take a short break (2-3 minutes) and repeat 10 times with a new distraction.

6.  Once your puppy is successful in a low distraction environment, make it more difficult. Below is the order of difficulty that you should follow:

    a.  Low distraction environment – Low distraction items
    b.  Low distraction environment – High distraction items
    c.  High distraction environment – No distracting items (just eye contact)
    d.  High distraction environment – Low distraction items
    e.  High distraction environment – High distraction items

7.  Remember, if your puppy is having a hard time disengaging from the distraction, make it easier. Move further away from the distraction or remove it altogether.

8.  Finally, there should be no cues for this behavior. You are simply capturing a response without verbally cueing the puppy.