

The “To Me” and the “Give” commands.

For when you want the dog to bring you something.

“To Me”. This is really just an extension of the “Come” command. Therefore, it should not be taught until the pup is highly reliable with the “Come” command. The two commands serve quite a different purpose. The “Come” command is a general purpose command that requires the pup come to you reliably, regardless of circumstances. The “To Me” command is specifically intended to have them bring something that they have in their mouth to you, and ultimately to give it to you (see below). Our application of this command will be the retrieval of something for the child, typically their medicine, or other support materials. We will use the “Meds” command to have the dog find the desired object. Ultimately, this command will also prompt the dog to bring it to the child. However, in transition, dogs are prone to play with the object rather than bringing it promptly. The “To Me” command helps bridge this gap.

To teach this command, wait until the dog has a stick or toy in their mouth. This could be something that they picked up voluntarily or something that you tossed to them. Issue the “Come” command. They may be reluctant to come, as they want to play with the object. I have found that crouching down to their level is a strong “Come” incentive. As they are coming, give the “To Me” command a couple of times. At first, reward/praise them for just coming to you. Then gradually limit praise for only when they present the object to your hand. You should soon be able to drop the initial “Come” command as they should come as reliably with just the “To Me” command.

Try not to confuse the pup by miss-using the commands. The “To Me” command should never be used when they do not have an object that you plan to take in their mouth. If so, be sure to follow up with the “Give” part of the procedure. It is OK to use the “Come” command even if they have something in their mouth, if you don’t intend for them to give it to you.

Now for the more difficult part.

“Give”. Our ultimate goal is for the dog to give the desired object to a child. Since this will normally be some kind of pouch, or bag, I use something like that (old small purse, pencil bag, etc.) as my training object. Reserve this object for training only, and put it away when the session is over. It is not a toy, with one exception. If the dog is initially reluctant to take the object in its mouth, then temporarily make it a toy by teasing the dog with it and tossing it.

The dog must learn to freely give you this object when you take it in your hand, but you do not want them to drop it at your feet. At no time in these sessions should you say drop it. The

“Drop It” command has an entirely different purpose; which is to have the dog immediately drop some undesirable object to the ground.

With the dog on a very short leash, start by placing the object directly in their mouth. Release it for a moment, and then re-grasp it firmly saying “Give”. If they pull away, release it immediately (no tug games). The short leash will keep them close. Try to gently remove the object from the dog’s mouth (see “pressure point below) to end the session. Take a 1 – 2 minute break before beginning the game again. With some dogs, they will tire of this and let go to continue the game or, even to just catch a breath. When they do, reward them. After several successes with this, you can intermittently toss the object and give the “To Me” command to bring them close enough for you to grasp the item. If they run away with the object, do not chase them. This just makes it a game. Running away indicates that you need to go back and work on “To Me” before proceeding with “Give”.

This process takes patience, but most dogs ultimately figure out what you want. However, some dogs are more persistent and you will have to resort to the “treat” approach. Have a treat well concealed in one hand. With the other hand, grasp the object and before giving them a chance to tug, say “Give” and open your treat hand. They should release the object just to get the treat. Gradually fool them with no treat in your closed hand. When they release the object, expecting a treat, open the hand, but use it to pet them and praise them instead. Gradually, they will come to just expect the praise.

One of the problems with the treat approach is that the pup gets so anxious for the treat that they drop the object on the floor before you grasp it. Do NOT reward this behavior! If this happens, just ignore the object on the floor. If possible toss a new object and try again. Otherwise, wait a minute or two before picking up the object on the floor and using it again.

If all else fails, you can use the pressure point behind the upper canine teeth or fangs. Reach your thumb and forefinger around your dog’s muzzle and squeeze this spot as you say “Give.” Praise your dog the instant his jaw muscles relax.