

# IMPULSE CONTROL



Dogs have evolved as opportunistic scavengers. This makes them inherently impulsive, so controlling those impulses does not come naturally to them. Self-control needs to be trained a little at a time.

Ironically, the first element of impulse control is motivation; we need the dog to be motivated in order for her to learn how to hold himself back. The motivation will depend on the individual. For example, I don't eat lamb, so I won't be fighting anyone around the fire for a chop. My dogs, on the other hand, have a hard time controlling themselves when there's meat of any description in the near vicinity. So your first step is to make a list of some things that your dog enjoys. Vienna? Water? Chasing the cat? Digging holes in the garden? The behaviours you may have struggled with in the past can be used to your advantage.

## Release Cue

Have some food ready that your dog really likes. You can use a bowl or place the food directly onto the floor. Have your dog in a sit or down position and cup your hand over the food. Remove your hand from the food for a split second and if your dog goes for the food, replace your hand over the food.

[Impulse control video](#)

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## Troubleshooting

1. If your dog does not have a well-trained sit or down position, you may need to use some training aids such as a collar or harness to restrain her.
2. If your dog is struggling to back away from the food, move it slightly further away from her to set her up for success.
3. If your dog can't control himself around the food, use a slightly less enticing option such as her regular kibble or even apples or carrots i.e. something that she will eat, but will not go crazy over.
4. If she is scratching, gnawing at your hand, wear gloves.

## Wait

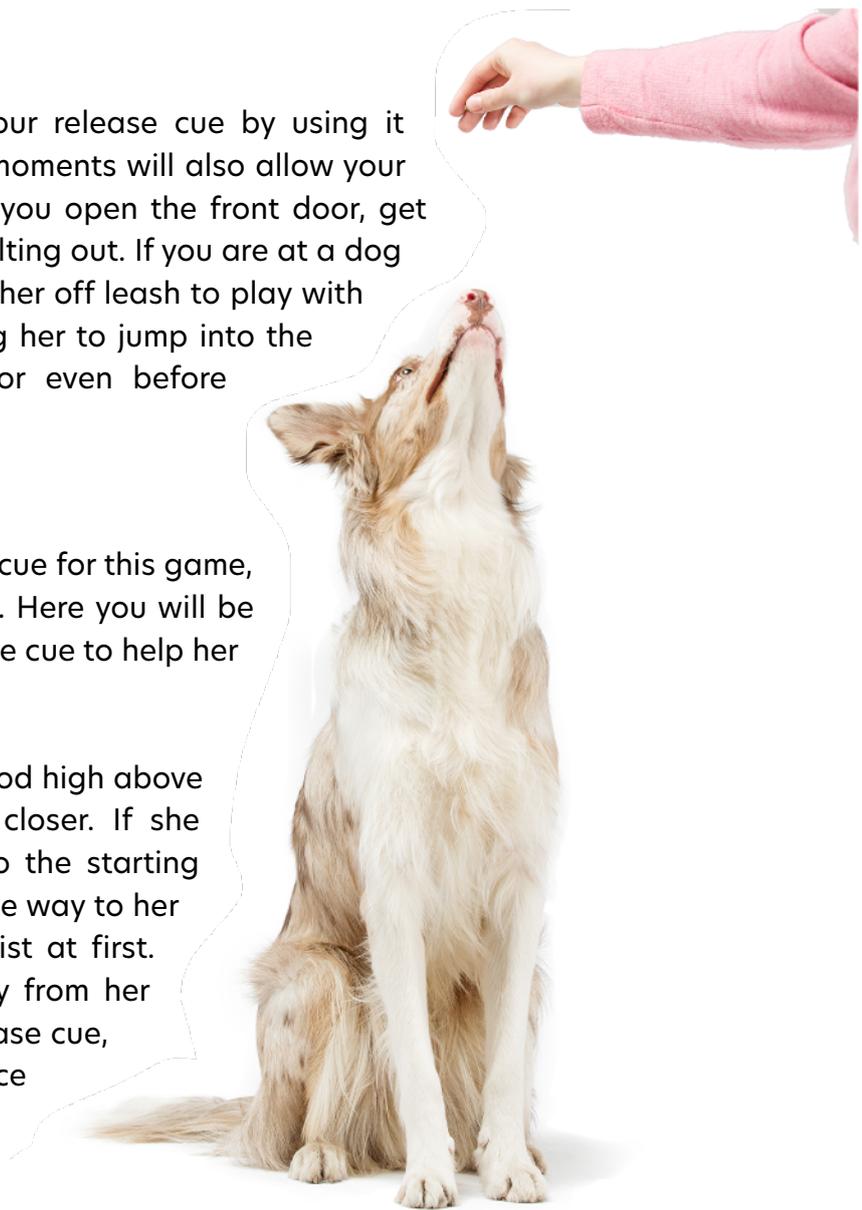
You can supercharge the quality of your release cue by using it throughout your day to day life. These moments will also allow your dog to practice impulse control. When you open the front door, get her to wait for the release cue before bolting out. If you are at a dog park, use the release cue before letting her off leash to play with her friends. Use the cue before allowing her to jump into the pool or lake, before chasing a toy, or even before offering her daily meals.

## Plane Game

It's best if your dog knows how to sit on cue for this game, but it's not a train smash if she doesn't. Here you will be using some clever timing and your release cue to help her generalize impulse control.

Ask your dog to sit. Dangle a piece of food high above her nose. Move the treat closer and closer. If she lunges for it, lift your hand back up to the starting position. Don't try to take the treat all the way to her nose as this will be too difficult to resist at first. Bring the treat in to about 30cm away from her nose, pause for a second, give your release cue, and feed. Gradually reduce the distance to her nose a centimetre at a time so that you set her up for success.

### Plane Game



## Flirt pole

A flirt pole is basically like a giant cat toy (see picture) made from a horse lunge whip, but works wonders for burning off extra energy with dogs too! It is however important that your dog is able to drop the tug toy when you ask. So you will need to train a solid “drop” before commencing this game if you haven’t done so already ([click here to learn how](#)). You can then use your release cue (or a separate cue such as “get it”) when releasing to chase the toy. Keep the movements fluid and fun, as sharp changes in direction can cause injury.



[Flirt Pole Video](#)

## Leave it

Teaching your dog to leave something is helpful in many scenarios. This cue is usually reserved for when a dog must not be allowed access to the desired item. For example, if you are on a walk and you come across a dead bird. Your dog will naturally want to investigate, but if you say “leave” she should know that exploration is not an option. This is for her own safety. If your dog wants to chase a cat or jump on a child, saying ‘leave’ is for the cat and child’s safety.

Prepare two types of food:

1. Low value (e.g. kibble, dog biscuits—she must want the food, but not be crazy about it)
2. High value (e.g. chicken, liver bread—the crazier the better!)

Start with the low-value food in your (closed) hand held out in front of you, and the high-value food in the other hand, behind your back. Your dog should try to get to the food in your front hand by licking or pawing at it. Don’t let her have the food. The second she does anything that is NOT trying to get to the food—looks away, sniffs the floor, turns her head, looks at you, etc.—mark with “YES!” And give her a piece of the higher value food from your other hand. Your dog learns that when she controls himself and ignores nice things, even BETTER things happen! Switch hands so that she doesn’t learn to expect food from the left.

[Video Link](#)