

Fun and Games for Your Dog

Playing games with your dog strengthens bonds and reinforces your relationship. It allows you to develop understanding, respect and communication with your dog. Games enable you to work together and communicate, as well as being great fun! Play is a very important part of developing social relationships. Play can help with training, but the emphasis should be on having fun as opposed to 'formal' training.

Some dogs can get over excited during playtime, if this happens simply break off the game and have some time out until your dog calms down.

Games will make your dog use his brain as well as his body, so don't overdo it as your dog may tire much quicker than you expect!

As with any training or games if you use food treats to reward our dog be sure to adjust his daily food rations accordingly otherwise your dog could become rather tubby!

Try to teach one game at a time to avoid confusing your dog. Make all games easy to start with and progress in small stages. Far better to take things slowly than to go too fast and confuse (and potentially put off) your dog. If you encounter problems or confusion, go back a stage, or leave it a while before trying again. Never get cross with your dog, these games are meant to be fun!

Here are just a few games that you can play with your dog at home, or on walks:

Hide and Seek

Hide and Seek can be played indoors or outdoors – in the garden or even on walks. If playing Hide and Seek on walks, be sure to do so in a safe place and make sure that you can keep an eye your dog at all times.



When you are out of sight, call your dog to you. You can use a 'recall' word (eg. Come or Here) or just call your dogs name. When your dog comes to you, be very excited and give lots of praise (and treats if you wish). Start to make the game more difficult by hiding behind doors, behind the sofa, at the bottom of the garden etc. If your dog doesn't find you straight away, call again. When you are 'found' give lots of praise and rewards.

If your dog has a solid 'wait' (or stay) you could place your dog in a wait/stay before you go and hide. Some dogs will use their noses for this task, whereas others will just look for you. As well as being great fun, this game will help your dog learn a faster more reliable recall.

If playing Hide and Seek when out on a walk, you could hide behind a tree or a hedge – but please make sure you are in safe place away from roads and livestock, and always keep an eye on your dog. Do not play this outside if your dog is nervous or worried or is liable to panic if you go out of sight.

Treasure Hunt (find the treat!)

This game can be played in, or out of, doors.

Place your dog in a down-stay (or any old stay really!), place a treat (food or toy) within their sight. Go back to your dog and encourage him to go to the treat, it can then be eaten or played with, depending on the type of treat.

Repeat this stage a couple of times, varying where you put the treat but so that the treat remains in sight until your dog begins to get the idea. Start to introduce a command – such as 'find' or 'seek'.

Take the game a stage further by 'hiding' the treat where your dog can't see it, but can see you putting it there (behind a piece of furniture or behind a door, for example). Release your dog from the stay and let him 'win' the treat. If your dog is a little slow to cotton on, you may need to show him the way.

The next stages are to hide the treat further away, then in another room, then out of sight and so on. You can increase the distance, difficulty, and even number of treats (several small food bits) as your dog gets better at 'stay'.

This is a great game to build the confidence of a dog that may be nervous about having their people going out of sight, and for dogs that have just begun to learn 'stay'.

Treasure Hunt (find the person!)

A variation on "Treasure Hunt (find the treat!)", this time involving another person.

Get a friend, or member of your family to hide, having first made it clear to your dog that they have a treat (food or a toy).

Make it easy to start with by allowing your dog to watch where the person goes (not too far away). Ask your dog to "Find Mum/Auntie/Mary/John" and release your dog so they can 'find' the person. If necessary go with your dog and encourage him to 'find' until he gets the idea. When the person is found praise your dog and give the treat (food or toy) held by the person being found.

As your dog gains in confidence and gets the hang of the game increase the difficulty by having the person go to different rooms, or into the garden. As the game becomes 'old hat' you can teach your dog to find friends/members of the family by name...

Quite a party trick!

Treasure Hunt (on walks)

Similar to tracking (see below) – you can encourage your dog to find treasure while out for walks!

When you are out on a walk, drop a favourite toy (or a biscuit if your dog is not interested in toys) without your dog seeing you. Continue walking for a few paces. Call your dog to you and ask him to 'Find it' or whatever command you wish to use. Help your dog by pointing him in the right direction, or going with him. Encourage your dog to retrace your route (he should be able to follow your scent even if he wasn't watching exactly which way you went) until the toy, or food is found. Have a big game and celebration upon finding the reward - lots of praise, games and food treats!

You could start by using a long lead, or light rope at first to help you keep the dog on the right track. After a while you can start to increase the distance and make the article a little more difficult to find. Be careful not to throw the article too far where you walked otherwise your dog may struggle to find it. Only increase distances as your dog becomes more confident and understands what this game is all about.

Remember – it's supposed to be fun!!

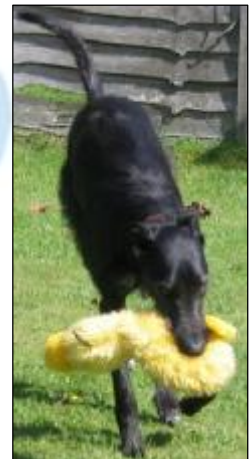
Fetch

A simple game of throw the ball/toy can help to develop your dogs retrieve 'for fun' training.

Some dogs are natural retrievers, whereas others are not. Every dog can learn to enjoy this game, but it is handy if you teach and practice the 'give' or 'drop it' (or similar command) first!

A game of Fetch can be 'shaped' by rewarding your dog for showing interest in a toy, then approaching a toy, then touching it, then mouthing it, then picking it up.

If a formal retrieve is required, take care to distinguish between fun retrieves and formal retrieves.



Tracking

Definitely an outdoor game! You can teach your dog to search for food, toys, people – anything!

Put your dog on a long line (flexi-lead, lunge line or light rope), ask your dog to 'stay' or enlist the help of a friend to hold your dog. Show your dog that you have a treat (food or a favourite toy). Walk backwards, facing your dog, for about 15-20 yards. Drag your feet to maximise the scent trail and hold the reward near the floor to encourage the dog to search at ground level. Try to keep your dog's attention but don't let him follow you yet. Leave the reward at the end of your trail, return to your dog along the same path taken to leave the trail. Encourage your dog to sniff the ground where you walked until he finds the reward. As your dog begins to get the idea you can start to introduce a new command such as 'track'.

As your dogs gets the hang of this game, you should be able to walk more normally (forwards rather than backwards!) when laying the trail and start to incorporate simple turns, eg. straight line, left turn, a couple of paces and place the reward. You can build up to walking in different directions, first in an "L" shape, then in more complicated patterns. Make sure that you make any changes slowly to avoid your dog getting confused, and don't overdo it – keep the sessions short and always end on a positive note. Try to make it as easy as possible for your dog to win his reward and remain keen for his game.

Tidy up Toys

Get hold of a container, a box or bucket for example, and collect a number of your dogs toys (not too many– start off with only 2 or 3) plus (perhaps) a couple of other dog-safe items. Do not use items that you do not want your dog to ever have, or items that he might be likely to hoard/guard.

Scatter the toys in a small area on the floor, have your chosen container close by. The aim, at this stage, is to encourage your dog to pick up the items one at a time, and place them in your hand (which will be close the container!). Once the dog is lifting the items high enough to get your hand underneath to receive, you are well on your way. Be sure to reward each "gift" with a food treat and much praise. You may have to start by praising and treating if your dog just shows an interest in an object and 'shape' that behaviour until the dog is picking up an object. Clicker training is perfect for this type of game/training.

Once your dog is reliably picking up the objects and placing them in your hand, you can start to make it harder to place the items into your hand. You must maintain the 'fun' element – you put a toy in my hand, you get a reward (game/food). Take this stage very slowly – it is far more rewarding for your dog (and you) to succeed than to fail. Make it as easy as possible and only increase the difficulty when your dog is 'solid' in his learning. If your dog (or you) become frustrated go back a stage, there is no hurry.

As you are 'handed' an item, pop it straight into the waiting container reward your dog. Having the container placed directly under your hands could be an advantage! Any steps by your dog to drop an object directly into the container should be met with much praise and rewards, throw a small party! Over time you can start to introduce a command such as 'tidy up' and you should aim for your dog to place the items directly into the container than your hand. Adding more toys and a variety of objects will increase the difficulty, but remember to only progress in small stages. Do not expect too much and overface your dog. It's only a game!

Simon Says

Turn a training session into a fun game.

When you ask your dog to take up a position, you take up that position! You sit when he sits, you lie down when he lies down, you stand when he stands and so on. You'll soon discover if your dog really knows the commands that you use, or whether he relies on your body language. You can also try giving commands from other positions; try with your eyes closed (you'd need a helper to let you

know what your dog is doing!), give commands with your back turned, you could even stand on your head!

Tuggy

Most dogs enjoy a game of tug, others are just not interested. Some dogs will have been trained specifically *not* to tug. If your dog is not interested, don't push it – there are plenty of other games that you can play together.

If your dog is an enthusiastic tugger, the secret of a good game of tug is for you to remain in control, and to follow certain 'rules' – otherwise a game of tug can escalate into a battle of wills! For successful games of tug, it is very useful if your dog has been taught a 'drop' or 'leave' command.

Try to keep a special toy that is used only for tuggy type games – a tug rope/ragger is ideal. There are also some bungee style toys available that are great for playing tug with.

You start the game by picking up the toy and encouraging your dog to also pick it up and play. You can give a particular cue word to indicate that the game has started, such as "lets tug!". Tug a few times, and then ask your dog to drop/leave – make sure you use the same cheerful, playful tone of voice. Reward your dog for dropping the tug toy – a food treat or another game of tug!

If your dog starts to get over excited, agitated or too rough, end the game. Ask your dog to drop/leave the toy, praise for the toy being dropped/left and put the toy away. If your dog refuses to let go, gently take hold of your dogs collar and release the 'pulling' motion by gently pushing the toy towards your dog. It takes two to tug, if the pressure is released the game has to end.

Practice playing tuggy: Drop it - Tug - Drop it. Always reward when your dog drops/leaves the toy and reward when you decide to end the game. Rewards can be praise, a food treat, another game or a cuddle.



Tricks

There are many tricks that you can teach your dog. This is one area that Clicker Training can really come in handy.

Here are just a few suggestions:

Beg
Bow
Carry
Circle (round you)
Close the case
Close the door
Crawl
Find the (tv remote, keys, purse)
Get into box
Give paw
Go to bed/sleep (pull over blanket!)
Hide your eyes
High Five
Hold an Object
Jump
Jump on chair
Lick lips
Look Behind You
March
Open the case
Open door

Paw on object
Play dead
Put head on one side
Rest Chin or Head (on object/person)
Ride a Skateboard
Ring a bell
Roll over
Say your prayers
Shake 'hands'
Smile
Speak
Spin / Twist
Sneeze
Stand up (on hind legs)
Speak
Target
Touch
Walk backwards
Wave
Weave
Yawn

The list is endless... have fun!