

PLAY & EXERCISE

The Importance of Play & Exercise

Play with owners and other friendly dogs provide a dog with some of the dog's exercise requirement, and also helps meet social needs. Insufficient exercise (resulting in boredom) and social attention can contribute to problem behaviors including chewing, digging, garbage raiding, hyperactivity, unruliness, excitability, attention-getting behaviors, and even some forms of barking.

It is especially important to ensure that a dog's need for exercise has been met prior to leaving the dog alone at home and prior to lengthy crating or confinement sessions.

Training Through Play & Exercise

Playing with your pet should be enjoyable activity for both of you. The puppy gets exercise while positive interactions take place. Training sessions that teach obedience or tricks are also an excellent way to gain owner leadership and control, while providing interaction between you and your puppy. In addition training through play & exercise builds a bond between you and your dog, and gives the dog the mental stimulation required.

Further examination of most of the popular dog "games" provide elements that will be handy and sometimes necessary in your dogs life. By teaching Fetch (instructions below) to a dog, you will teach the *out* command. This command will come in handy when the dog picks up something dangerous, expensive, or breakable.



We're Walkin'...Yes, Indeed

Taking your dog for a walk is a good basic way to accomplish a limited amount of exercise. As young as 8-weeks old familiarize your puppy with a flat, nylon or leather, buckle collar and a lightweight leash. Start by attaching the lightweight leash to the puppy's collar and allow your puppy to drag the leash around the kitchen or in a supervised area so he may become familiar with his new equipment. Let the puppy become used to the leash dragging along with him and have it become a regular part of his space. Next, teach the puppy to walk on the leash. Put your puppy on the leash. Using your voice and some food treats or a toy reward as a lure, encourage him to follow you. Reward the puppy for following you with food treats and happy praise. Keep the initial walks short to encourage compliance and success.

Tug-of-War

Tug-of-war type games are an enjoyable diversion for many puppies and directs chewing and biting toward an acceptable play object, rather than an owner's hand or clothing. If you play tug-of-war, always allow the puppy to win. Winning builds self esteem and confidence in the puppy. After all, who wants to play a game they never win? Any family that has children less than 12 years of age should **NOT** play tug-of-war or wrestling games with the dog.

Hide & Seek/ Find It

Dogs can be taught to play “hide and seek”. The human hides with a treat or a toy and rewards the dog for finding them. Other dogs like to “search” for their toys or treats in the home. Teach this game by allowing the dog to see you hide a high value treat under a cushion, then tell him to “*find it*”. The combined rewards of the treat he found and your praise will promote this game as a favorite. Expand the game using different items to hide. Eventually, hide the treat without the puppy knowing the location, possibly hide several treats. This can be a great game and the puppy will love the challenge. These types of challenges provide mental stimulation.

Teaching Fetch

Most dogs, puppies and adults, even those that do not have an inherent instinct to retrieve, can be taught to fetch. Fetch is the union of four separate activities: holding the toy in his mouth, getting the toy, bringing it back, and dropping it so that you can throw it again.

First, make the toy enticing. Try a squeaky toy or a ball. Start with something your dog already has an interest in. Let the dog take it in its mouth. You can use the cue “*hold it*” to teach an association word with the behavior. Praise and pet the dog as it holds the toy. Don’t try to take it away immediately but make a big fuss out of him just holding the toy. When teaching *hold-it*, only require that the dog hold the toy for a VERY short time. Gradually, as the dog becomes confident in your request, you will extend the time.

When the dog is consistently holding the toy for several seconds, use the cue “*out*” or “*give*” and immediately show your dog another identical toy or a small food treat. The second toy must have equal (or preferably greater) value to the dog. Most dogs will gladly give the original toy to get the new toy and will quickly learn the “*out*” or “*give*” command. Knowing this exercise also comes in handy when he picks up your favorite shoe.

When your dog is consistently holding and then dropping the toy on command, toss the toy a short distance (1-2 feet) then encourage your dog to chase the toy. When he goes toward the toy, praise him. If he picks it up in his mouth, make your praise even more intense. With the toy in his mouth, move backwards away from him a very short way (1-2 feet), clap your hands and entice your dog to come towards you. This is all while encouraging verbally in a happy tone of voice and lots of praise.



When the dog returns to you, say, “*out*” or “*give*” and immediately show the other toy or small food treat. Then, by repeating the entire sequence of events again (and again, and again), the game of fetch should be enough of a reward that food and toys will no longer be necessary to entice the dog to give the toy.

At the end of each fetch play session, have the dog return the toy and give a toy or chew treat for the dog to play with as a final reward for releasing the toy. It is important for the dog to be able to perform the individual elements (*hold it, return, out*) before combining the elements for the full scope of the game. Start with very short fetch training sessions at first (1-5 minutes) but do several each day and always end with your dog wanting more!!!!

How Much Exercise and Play is Appropriate?

Determining an appropriate amount and type of play/ exercise will depend on the type and the age of your dog. Breeds of dogs that are bred for stamina or to do “work”, often have higher exercise requirements. Consider their traditional work when deciding the type and amount to provide.

Every dog, young or old, should have at least two exercise sessions EVERY DAY. The duration will range from 15 minutes for a puppy or senior citizen and up to 60 minutes for a healthy adult dog. Any dog under sixteen



months of age should NOT be asked to do rigorous heavy exercise, such as jogging, as it may cause skeletal issues in a growing dog.

Things to Remember

- # A dog can be taught to play/ work/ new things at ANY age. You **can** teach an old dog new tricks.
- # Exercise & play are required every day.
- # Dogs require physical and mental exercise.
- # Exercise should be fun for all involved.
- # Be creative with your games & exercise.
- # By teaching a dog a “game” like *fetch* or *find-it* you are teaching valuable elements that will have practical application during your dog’s life.
- # A tired dog is a happy dog & a happy owner.

