

How to play tug of war with your dog

Material adapted from Jean Donaldson's The Culture Clash
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For years, dog owners have been discouraged from playing tug with their pets with the thought that it encourages aggression, biting and dominance. This being said, dogs are PREDATORS. Some trainers then suggest the game of tug arouses this instinct. This is true, BUT if the game is well controlled by the handler this activity is a great outlet of energy for dogs and their people. It can be done indoors, takes little time ,and uses little equipment.

Tug of War , if played with rules(which will be discussed below), is not only a good source of exercise, but increases dog focus and confidence. It can increase our relationship with our dog because it is a "group" activity as without US its just a lifeless toy. "It 's not you vs. the dog, its you AND the dog vs. the tug of war toy.

Necessary equipment

Leash and collar(4-6 foot leash, no flexies-recommend leather leash)
Tug item(only 1 item and not out UNLESS playing tug

Rules of the games

1. Dog must "OUT" on command
2. Dog may NOT take or retake item until commanded to do so
3. Frequent breaks with short obedience exercise session
4. Zero tolerance for accidents

The Process

Rule #1: Dog must let go of toy immediately when commanded to release!

1. Teach release command- Choose 1 word and stick to it. Ideas include out, drop, give.
2. How to get release:
Give command and then put tasty treat up to mouth to encourage release.
Dog gets treat and handler takes toy.
3. If dog will not release toy. Wait it out as the game loses its fun without your interaction.. Most dogs will ultimately drop the toy. Then give the treat.

3. DO NOT CHASE the dog if he/she runs off with the toy. I prefer to play this game with the dog on leash to prevent this problem. I hold leash and tug toy in same hand.

Rule #2 :Dog may not take item unless commanded to do so- YOU control the game.

1. Teach a command to take the toy (e.g. Get it, fetch...)-I usually wave or shake the toy to help initiate the game
2. If the dog anticipates your command and goes for the toy BEFORE you cue him to do so then IMMEDIATELY put the dog in a sit or down stay. Wait 30 sec to 1 minute then release him. Then recue him to get his toy. If he continues to grab the toy without permission, say GAME OVER and put the toy away for the day

Rule #3: Take Obedience breaks- Keeps you in control of the game

1. practice some heeling or recalls-short and on leash or a sit or down stay for 1-3 minutes

Rule #4::Zero Tolerance Rule: no contact of teeth with human skin

1. If at ANY time, the dog makes contact with your hand,(or any body part), or grabs a hold of your clothing, game is STOPPED. Say "game over and put toy away..

Useful tools for this game

1. Release command
2. Leave it command
3. Sit/down commands
4. Wait command

