



Playing Tug with your Dog

Candi Moon



In the past, and even today, playing tug with your dog can get a bad rap. According to some, this will make your dog 'dominant'. As the latest research shows, wolf pack theory is not applicable to dogs, and was based on faulty research to begin with. 'Dominance' and 'being alpha' are redundant in dog training. Dogs are domesticated animals, not wild wolves, they are not hierarchical, nor do they think that human beings are also dogs.

So with the old wives tales out of the way, there's no reason not to enjoy a game of tug with your dog, and there are lots reasons to play this game with him. Firstly tug uses up a lot of energy so is a good supplement to your walks to give your dog exercise, and can also be used on days when you don't have time to take your dog for a walk or if the weather is bad.

Done properly, tug is an excellent way to teach your dog to be polite with his teeth around human hands. Its also a wonderful way to work on your dog's self-control and to teach him to give up items willingly.

Firstly, select a toy to play tug with, it should be sturdy enough to stand up to your dog's pulling and also large enough for both of you to hold on to it comfortably.

Your tug toy should be special, it belongs to you, not your dog, and she only sees it when you play a game of tug together, after that it should be put away. This helps you to build drive for this particular toy; over time it becomes a highly desirable reward for your dog and you can begin giving access to this toy, and to tug games, as a reward for other behaviours you want to encourage. Games of tug can also be a great way to reward dogs who are not that interested in food treats in training.

What if your dog shows no interest in the tug toy? Some dogs just don't seem to have a play drive, but teaching your dog to lighten up and play can be of great psychological benefit to him. You can go about building drive for your tug toy by interacting with it yourself and not giving him access to it. Examples would be to toss the tug toy up into the air and then catch it, all the while making happy noises and letting your dog know playing with this toy is the greatest fun ever. You and your partner or child could throw the toy between you and make a great game of it. Do not, at this stage let your dog touch the toy. After doing this for a bit, put the toy away in a spot where your dog cannot reach it, but can see it, like on top of the fridge. If you keep this up for a week or two your dog will begin thinking, 'What is it about this thing? I want it!'

Once you've reached the stage where your dog is jumping up, showing excitement and just begging to get at that toy when you take it out, you are ready to begin playing tug with her.

First hold the toy behind your back or out of your dog's reach and ask him to sit politely for you to initiate the game. Once he has done this, let him grab the toy and begin tugging.

Every so often, stop the game and ask your dog to release the toy and sit, then resume play. This teaches your dog to remain under control even when excited and develops your dog's self-control. At first you can train this by producing a food treat, dangling the treat under the dog's nose, and saying 'give' when the dog releases the toy to take the treat. After you have practised this five or six times ask the dog to give, without first producing the treat. If the dog releases the toy, reward with a food treat and resume the game. If the dog does not release the toy, dangle a treat under her nose again and repeat your 'give' command. Try this a few times and then ask the dog to 'give' again without first offering the treat.

Over time you will train a dog who will give up items on command. Getting a treat and then getting to resume the tugging game is a pretty good deal from your dog's perspective, so he learns that giving you things is good. You can then also use your 'give' command when your dog has picked up something you would rather he didn't have, like your shoe.

During your tug game, its very important that the dog takes care not to bite down on your delicate hands, and learns to respect this rule. If your dog accidentally bites a finger during the game, even if it didn't hurt, say 'ow' as if it was really painful, take the tug toy away and end the game for that day. Your dog will very quickly learn to avoid your hands with his teeth.

This article may be freely distributed provided it is left intact. Copyright Furbabies Training School

Brought to you by Furbabies Training School

Tel: 079 490 3233

Fax: 086 545 7303

Email: furbabiestraining@gmail.com

Website: www.furbabiestraining.co.za

