

## How to Play with Your Dog...and be Fun to Play With!



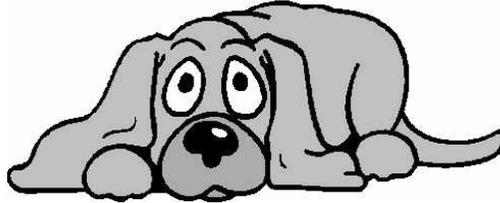
*Have you ever watched two dogs play? Have you ever watched a “pack leader” dog play with a subordinate dog? In order to initiate play with your dog, you have to play like a dog plays, not like a human plays. Like a “pack leader” dog, you can still retain status if you play the game correctly. Note: these suggestions are for competition dogs, not for dogs with dominance aggression issues.*

<b>DON'T</b>	<b>DO</b>
<p><b>Don't leave toys all around the house and yard for your dog.</b></p>	<p>When two dogs play with an item, it is always an item of value. If you want your dog to value toys, you need to select some toys that are for play just with you. Store them out of your dog's reach. Leave the non-valuable chew toys out, but keep all of the squeaky toys, tug toys and interactive toys for “invitation only”.</p>
<p><b>Don't let the dog choose which toys to play with and when to play with them.</b></p>	<p>You should initiate the <b>CHOICE TO PLAY</b>. The toys you use for motivational play should be special toys that are pulled out only for this purpose and later put away. Start with toys you think your dog will really enjoy, but work your way toward less exciting toys as you get better at this game.</p>
<p><b>Don't let playing with you be optional.</b></p>	<p>Try to start your play sessions in a relatively distraction-free environment so that if the dog doesn't play with you, there's nothing else fun to do like go sniff out a trail or chase squirrels. <b>PLAY WITH YOUR DOG ON LEASH SO THAT HE DOESN'T HAVE THE OPTION OF RUNNING OFF WITH THE TOY.</b></p>
<p><b>Don't shake a toy at your dog's face.</b></p>	<p>There's nothing fun about having something shaken in your face. If you want to get your dog excited about a toy, make a big deal about getting it out and try to hide it from the dog in your arms. Say “Ooooh. What do I have here???” Then drag the toy along the ground and encourage the dog to pounce on it. You might even want to tie the toy to a rope. <b>BUT THEN, LET THE DOG HAVE THE TOY.</b> Don't be so quick to grab the toy away! (Don't treat a toy like its something you don't want the dog to have or he will give up playing.) Let him shake it around and while he does, put your hands on the dog, ruff him up, and let him celebrate getting the toy.</p>

## How to Play with Your Dog...and be Fun to Play With! Continued...

<b>DON'T</b>	<b>DO</b>
Don't have your hands on the toy all the time.	Let the dog spend most of the playtime possessing the toy. Spend more time revving up the dog by ruffing him up than holding the toy. Convince him that the game is even more fun because you are playing with him.
Don't let the dog just stop playing with the toy.	If the dog stops playing with the toy, pick it up and play with it yourself. Act like a dog!!! If he comes back for the toy, let him get it and ruff him up to initiate play again.
Never tug harder than your dog can tug back.	Tugging for motivation training is not a battle of wills. If you always win then your dog will stop trying to tug. Let your dog think that he pulled the toy out of your hands and has actually "won" every now and then. Go ruff him up when he does.
Don't get in the habit of always throwing the toy far away from you.	Encourage your dog to play <i>with you</i> . The toy should only be fun for the dog when you are around. While retrieving can be fun and useful for distance work, you want to make sure your dog relies on you to "activate the toy". Toys on ropes can help make this transition.
Don't get caught with only one toy around.	Have alternate toys ready nearby in case one breaks or gets thrown in a place that you can't retrieve it.
Don't play until your dog is exhausted.	Quit while your dog still wants more.
Don't grab the toy out of the dog's mouth or over-use the "release" command.	Try to stop the game when you have possession of the toy. It sends the strongest message about the start and end of the game. However, if you need your dog to give back the toy, its better to just gently hold the dog's collar and go still and quiet until he gives the toy up. Don't ask him to release the toy every few minutes while playing. That's not a game or play, its an exercise. It may be necessary for dogs with very high toy drive, but it will quickly demotivate dogs low toy drive.
Don't let your dog run off with the favorite toy.	Have your dog on leash when you play. Always have more than one toy on your person to play with and retain the better toy hidden. If your dog breaks free and runs off with the toy, start whooping it up and playing with the "better toy" that you have hidden. Run around, leap, throw the toy in the air until he comes back and wants to play with your toy.
Don't get boring.	Change toys frequently and be genuine. Dogs know when you're having fun and when you aren't. But more importantly, after you play this game correctly for awhile, your dog should start to view the toy as secondary. It's YOU and your play with the dog that makes the toy fun. If you do this well, your dog won't even want to play with the toy until you "activate" it.

# HOW TO **AVOID** DE-MOTIVATING AN AGILITY DOG



*Disclaimer: The following summary is for motivation training for agility or competition sports. The assumption is that the owner and dog already have a relationship in which the dog respects the owner's leadership position in the pack. If leadership is an issue, the owner should first consider the "Ruff Love" program by Susan Garrett.*

<b>DE-MOTIVATING</b>	<b>MOTIVATING</b>
<p><b>"Uh-uhnt", "No", "Enht", "Wrong" when dog takes wrong obstacle or doesn't execute it properly</b></p>	<p><b>Use "Come" or "Off" in an upbeat tone and reward for that action rather than focusing on what the dog did wrong</b></p>
<p><b>Shoulder drop, head shake, sigh, frown, clenched fists</b></p>	<p><b>99% of all agility errors are the fault of the handler – whether a handling error, a lack of training, a lack of consistency in training, or a lack of repetition in training. Own your mistake, but more importantly, don't take your frustration out on your dog by expressing it with your body language. When you make a mistake, laugh at yourself – out loud. Then call your dog over to you and ask for a known behavior and reward him for being patient with you!</b></p>
<p><b>Stopping after mistake, ignoring dog, and looking to peers or friends to ask what you did wrong.</b></p>	<p><b>Ignoring your dog will send a strong message to your dog that he did something wrong. In fact, ignoring your dog like this is basically negative punishment! Own your mistake but don't pass the blame on to your dog. If there's a mistake, immediately ask your dog to do something simple like a trick or a recall, reward him, put him up in a crate or tether him, and then talk to your friends about what you did.</b></p>
<p><b>Cheerleading, babbling while the dog works.</b></p>	<p><b>While we humans think this is "encouragement", most dogs find it very frustrating. They don't hear the words you are saying, they mostly focus on the tone of your voice. If you sound stressed, they will pick up on the fact that you don't trust them to do the obstacle. Instead of cheerleading or babbling, use your voice sparingly – only to indicate when your dog does a great job. This will make the use of your voice a very positive thing the dog looks forward to, not a demotivating thing the dog works to avoid.</b></p>

## HOW TO **AVOID** DE-MOTIVATING AN AGILITY DOG continued...

<b>DE-MOTIVATING</b>	<b>MOTIVATING</b>
Stopping after mistake and calling your dog back to repeat an obstacle	The best advice in a trial is to just go on, assuming it was your mistake and there's no need to take it out on the dog. The other option in practice is to pretend that you meant to send the dog off-course or past the obstacle. Don't slow down -- re-connect with your dog, and continue on a circular path that would bring the dog back over the correct obstacle.
Starting the dog or re-starting the dog without connecting with him first.	Don't forget that agility is a team sport! Make sure you and your dog get eye contact before you run. You should strive to have the same connection with your dog in the ring at a trial that you have when you practice alone. Try not to be so focused on what YOUR goals are (i.e. qualifying and ribbons) and focus only on your training goals for your dog. Think of your ribbons as your reward for working well with your dog, not your goal.
Using all treat rewards and no play.	Food has a very calming effect, whereas toys generally cause the dog to become more excited. Toys stimulate prey drive whereas food generally reduces it. (Think about it -- there's no need to chase more prey when you've just had a full meal.) Use treats sparingly and as <u>rewards</u> , not bribes. Develop a play relationship with your dog (see Rules of Play)
Rhythmic clapping or "cheerleading" during a run.	These are often stress behaviors exhibited by the handler in a trial but not in practice. The effect is the same as a teacher hanging over your shoulder as you take a test. Again, try to imagine in competition that you are practicing with your dog and it's just the two of you. Praise your dog when he does well, but don't cheerlead him when he is slow.