

GOOD GAMES TO PLAY WITH YOUR DOG



By Michele Godlevski



Ground Rules First: LEAVE-IT & DROP-IT

Dogs use their mouths like we use our hands, so it is not unusual for your dog to grab something he finds interesting with his mouth. The issue is that some things are delicate, not edible, or downright dangerous!

There are two commands you can teach your dog to help with this situation. The first is the proactive command, “**leave-it**”. Use this command when your dog sees something of interest to him, but he hasn’t picked it up yet. You can teach leave-it by getting one very boring food item, like a baby carrot or a piece of lettuce, and then also a container full of high value treats. With your dog on leash to control his access, drop the low value item and quickly step on it, saying “leave-it”. Your dog will sniff under your foot and may even paw at your foot a bit. The instant your dog looks up at you and “gives up”, reward him with a high value treat. Repeat this exercise until your dog isn’t even looking at the low value item under your foot. For the next step, drop the low value item in a corner, and stand in front of it. Body-block the access to the low value item and give your dog a high value treat when he gives up and “leaves it”.

The other command, “**drop-it**”, can be used when your dog already has the item in his mouth. It is best to practice this command with a non-food item, like a paper towel or tissue. With your dog on leash, drop the item and allow your dog to pick it up. Stand on your dog’s leash so your hands are free. Then, grab a high value treat and show it to your dog, saying “drop-it”. The instant he drops the paper item, give him a treat with one hand as your other hand picks up the paper item. You should do this exercise without bending over top of the dog or going face to face with your dog. (See eye contact sensitivity handout).

“Leave-it” & “Drop-it” should be practiced 3-5 times per week. You can gradually change the item to be left or dropped to a higher value item, but always make sure the reward you have is higher value still.

Think of both of these commands as a “bank account” that you have with your dog. The more times you reward the correct behaviors for “leave-it” and “drop-it”, the greater your deposit in this account. Then, someday, when you get caught without a reward and use the commands, you will make a withdrawal from the account. If you have enough reinforcements, you will be able to ask for the behaviors without giving a reward. However, most people never deposit anything into their “leave-it” and “drop-it” accounts before they make big withdrawals. Make sure your account doesn’t get overdrawn!



Ground Rules First: STEALING & COUNTER-SURFING

Possession is nine-tenths of the law, and a dog seems to just know that. Dogs steal food for obvious reasons -- it is just plain tasty! However, dogs that steal non-food objects most often are thieves because it's the best way to get your attention. It doesn't matter *what* words come out of your mouth in response – ANY ATTENTION, (EVEN NEGATIVE ATTENTION), IS STILL ATTENTION! Not only do they get you to stop what you are doing, but sometimes you even chase them around the house! What a fun game that is for your dog! Another factor often not in your favor is something called variable reinforcement. One time the dog stole a paper towel which wasn't very tasty, but the next time, he stole the whole pot roast! Just like fishing or golf, variable reinforcement is a powerful motivator. Every time your dog hits the "jackpot", he is that much more hooked on his new "hobby".

So, for this behavior problem, the very first thing you must do is management, management, management! Shoes need to be kept in the closet and laundry needs to be in the hamper. Bread can be stored in a bread box and meat can be defrosted in the sink instead of on the counter. Also, your dog can be crated or baby-gated when it is food-preparation time or during another time when thievery is common.

The next thing on your list is to teach and practice the "drop it" command. (see Drop-It & Leave-It handout) You should practice the "drop-it" command, with your dog on leash, and drop an item he is likely to steal. When he picks the item up, step on the leash (to prevent it from becoming a game of chase), and say "drop-it". Trade him for a high value treat. Repeat this over and over until he is bringing you the item and dropping it before you ask him to. Next, repeat the exercise with a more difficult item. After this, do the exercise with the dog off leash, in a small, gated off area of your house (to prevent the chase game).

In the meantime, if your dog steals something, remember that yelling and chasing are EXACTLY the behaviors your dog wants from you! Unless the item is life-threatening to the dog, try to remain calm, go get a high value treat, and corner off the dog by closing a door to a room before asking for him to drop-it. ***Note: If your dog runs under or behind a piece of furniture, coax him out by tossing the treat out on the floor, away from the furniture. Do not reach in toward your dog when he is hidden behind furniture, as that action can be perceived as threatening, and could result in a bite.***

References: *Mine!* By Jean Donaldson



treats.

Ground Rules First: IMPULSE CONTROL

Dogs can be impulsive creatures, and usually have a seemingly insatiable desire to run, chase, and bark! The first step to a calmer dog around the house is to make sure your dog has a regular exercise program, which includes not only **physical exercise**, but **mental stimulation**, and **social contact** with other dogs as well. Active young dogs, under the age of 18 months, usually need a balance of these three types of stimulation every day. Examples of physical exercise include, but are not limited to playing ball, swimming, hiking, and dog agility. Examples of social contact include doggie daycare, a play-date with a doggie friend, a field trip to a pet store, or a puppy class. Bright dogs need to be challenged with mental stimulation like learning tricks, or puzzle toys or scent-work games where the dog uses its nose to find

After you are sure your dog's energy and stimulation needs are being met, you can begin to work on teaching him some self control. One of the best ways to help a dog understand a stay is to first teach him to go to a "mat" or portable dog bed of some kind. Next, pair this "mat" command with a down-stay. Be sure to reward your dog for staying on his bed. You can also keep your dog on leash and step on the leash, to help him understand that this is "quiet time". In addition, you could offer your dog a favorite chew toy to occupy him while he remains on his mat. Start by asking him to do a down-stay on his mat in a quiet environment – perhaps at home, while you watch television in the evening. See if he can do a "stay" on his mat until the commercials. At the commercial break, release your dog and throw a ball for him to burn off some energy. When the show resumes, give the stay another try. After your dog has mastered being able to stay on his mat during television shows, try bringing his mat out to a quiet place outside like the front porch and see if he can do stays there. Next, you could bring your dog and his mat along to an outdoor café. See if your dog can stay while you enjoy a cup of coffee. If this goes well, graduate to bringing your dog and his mat to a playground or a park. Sit far enough away from the action that your dog can succeed. Gradually move closer. In these outdoor locations, keep your sessions to about 10 minutes, then release your dog from the stay and go play with him or take him for a nice walk.



Ground Rules First: MORE IMPULSE CONTROL



Dogs with a lot of energy often want to run up to every dog they see, to initiate play. While young dogs certainly need to play with other dogs, there is a place and time for play, and a place and time for some self-control. For instance, when you go into the veterinarian's office and there is a dog with a broken leg in the waiting room, you don't want your dog rushing up to play with him. For this reason, the "leave-it" command can be used in reference to other dogs. (See "Leave-it" handout). Another useful command when

walking past a dog that your dog will not be able to interact with, is an "attention" command, where you reward your dog for choosing to look at you instead of the other dog. Conversely, when it is time to greet a dog, be sure to give that action a command like "Say Hi". This way, your dog knows when it is o.k. to greet a dog and when it is not o.k. (rather than it being decided by how hard he pulls you toward the dog) On that note, the Gentle Leader head collar and the Easy Walk Harness are very helpful tools to teach a dog not to pull on impulsively pull on leash.

Another impulse control exercise you can implement is to ask your dog to sit-stay before he gets to do anything he likes to do. For instance, before he gets petted, before he goes out the door, before you set the food dish down, or before you throw the ball. Ideally, your dog should be able to sit-stay (until released) even when you bring him to play with his doggie friends.

Other exercises you can teach your dog to re-direct his focus back to you are a palm touch, and a heel position cue. Each one of these commands should be introduced in a quiet environment, and then eventually brought out into gradually more distracting environments.

Some fun challenges to work up to are:

- ❖ Sit-stay on a mat while you ring the doorbell
- ❖ Down-stay on a mat while you eat a full meal
- ❖ Sit-stay on a mat at a park where people and dogs are walking by
- ❖ Sit-stay in the pet store while you test out all of the squeaky toys
- ❖ "Leave-it" in the pet store in the bone and treat aisle
- ❖ Sit-stay in the pet store in the "critter" aisle
- ❖ Down-stay while you watch a movie at home and eat popcorn

References: *Chill Out Fido* by Nan Kene Arthur and *Control Unleashed* by Leslie McDevitt

SANDBOX TREASURE HUNT



Dogs LOVE to dig holes, especially in soft dirt or sand. It is quite common, in fact, for dogs to dig up freshly planted flowers, because the smell of all that fresh earth is just too much to bear!

Since digging is quite a pleasurable and also an energy-outlet exercise for your dog, you might want to consider putting in a “**doggie sand box**” in your back yard. You could bury some treasures in the sand box, like stuffed Kongs or a bully stick, and allow your dog to play pirate, digging up his buried treasure. You might even want to put the behavior on cue and say “dig!” while you use your hand or foot to dig at the sand .

Once you have provided a digging outlet, you can begin to cover the areas of the yard that you do not want to be dug up with some rough gravel. Dogs usually prefer their digging material to be soft to the touch, so gravel acts as a deterrent. Other ways to keep your dog from digging in an area include sprinkling cayenne pepper on the area (which needs to be replenished after it rains), and putting up garden fencing.

If you have moles in your yard, it may be especially difficult to convince your dog not to dig, especially if you have a terrier! Moles can be heard and smelled by the dogs, and are very tempting. In addition, the products used to keep moles out of the yard are not safe for dogs, which makes the problem more difficult. However, moles, like dogs, prefer nice soft dirt to dig in. You could try filling the holes with some gravel to put up a “road block” for the moles. You could also try burying your dog’s excrement in the holes, which will deter both the moles and your dog from digging again in that spot.



TUGGING & RETRIEVING

Watch the video at

<https://youtu.be/ZfdyMcyRTIY>

Many dogs love a good game of “tug” or several rounds of retrieving. There are a few key elements to each of these games that will ensure they can be played in a constructive way with your dog.

Retrieve: It is a lot easier to teach a retrieve if you always play the game with two identical objects. Begin in a small space (indoors is fine), and have your dog drag a leash if he is likely to run away with the toy. Throw the first toy only a short distance (5ft). As soon as your dog picks up the first toy, show him that you have a toy too...and begin to play with it. The instant your dog drops the first toy, throw the other toy for him in the opposite direction as the one he just came from. Pick up the first toy and repeat the game. Once your dog is getting the idea, you can say “drop-it” when he picks up his toy. Gradually increase your throwing distance, and then move to a quiet, fenced outdoor location.

RULES OF TUG

Tug: It is not really a “bad word”, nor an activity that “creates aggression” in a dog as some people might have told you. Those are myths. However, if you have a child in the house under the age of 8 years old, you may want to not play tug around the child, since the rules of tug are important, and not always possible for a young child to stick to or be able to physically handle.

1. **You start the game and you end the game.** This means you do not start playing tug when your dog takes his toy and tosses it at your hand. This also means that you keep the special toys used for tug in a cabinet (not out in the general space) and only pull them out when it is time for a game of tug. You should always put away a tug toy when the game is over.
2. **Teeth on skin = “game over”.** It is very important that your dog learn to keep his teeth on the toy. For this reason, you should *never* be playing games with him where you tease him with your hands and wrestle with him. These games DO increase aggression towards people and give the dog the wrong message that its o.k. to put their teeth on human skin. When you are playing tug, there is always a toy being used and preferably a very long, strong toy. You should give the dog plenty of space to grab the toy and tug on it. However, the instant he puts his teeth on you, the game should end. In order to let him know you are no longer tugging and to get him to release the toy, you should let go of the toy and put one hand in his collar, holding his head against your leg, to prevent him from shaking the toy back and forth or running away with it. Tell your dog to “drop-it” and wait for him to do so. You can then tell him “all done”, and put the toy away.
3. **No direct eye contact and no blowing in the face.** These are also actions that increase aggression and get people bitten (see the Eye Contact Sensitivity handout).
4. **Never tug harder than your puppy can tug back.** Puppy teeth are sometimes tender and you don’t want tug to be associated with pain or teeth popping out!

DOGGIE PING PONG



1. **This is a game that can be played inside or outside in a fully fenced area.**
2. **This game requires two people to play.**
3. **Each person should get a hand-full of small treats.**
4. **Each person should go to opposite ends of the room or the yard.**
5. **One at a time, each person calls the dog, using the recall command (“come” or “here”) in a very excited and happy voice.**
6. **When the dog arrives, give the dog a treat.**
7. **After the dog is done eating the treat, the other person calls the dog and does the same.**
8. **Work your way to longer distances between the two people.**
9. **If you want to work outside in an unfenced area, be sure to put a long line (30 ft cotton leash) on your dog for safety.**

HIDE & SEEK



1. **This is a game that can be played inside or outside in a fully fenced area.**
2. **This game requires two people to play.**
3. **Each person should get a hand-full of small treats.**
4. **One person should hold the dog's collar, while the other person runs to hide. (Note: take advantage of this opportunity to reward you dog for holding its collar!)**
5. **After finding a hiding spot, the first person calls the dog, using the recall command ("come" or "here") in a very excited and happy voice.**
6. **When the dog arrives, give the dog a treat as you grasp the dog by the collar.**
7. **After the dog is done eating the treat, the other person hides and calls the dog and does the same.**
8. **Work your way to longer distances between the two people.**
9. **If you want to work outside in an unfenced area, be sure to put a long line (30 ft cotton leash) on your dog for safety.**

FIND IT GAME

Watch the video at

https://youtu.be/oY_f7YbKnxl



1. **This is a game that can be played inside or outside in a fully fenced area.**
2. **This game requires only one person to play.**
3. **The person should get a hand-full of small treats or the dog's dry food.**
4. **Show the dog the handful of goodies, and then throw the handful, up into the air, letting the treats scattering all around.**
5. **Let the dog find the treats on the floor or in the grass.**
6. **This is a great game to play from the deck of your porch.**
7. **This game allows your dog to use his nose and forage for food.**

THE SHELL GAME

Watch the video at

https://youtu.be/oY_f7YbKnxI



1. **This is a game that can be played inside or outside in a fully fenced area.**
2. **This game requires only one person to play.**
3. **The person should get a hand-full of small treats and 2 containers of some sort. Cardboard boxes, empty margarine containers, and even dog dishes can be used.**
4. **Show the dog the handful of goodies, and then place one goodie under the box or container.**
5. **Let the dog push the container or box to find the treat.**
6. **Now make the game more difficult and put two containers down. Only put the food under one (and let your dog see you do it).**
7. **Next, while sitting on the floor with your knees slightly bent to make a “visual barrier”, have your dog on one side of you, while you put the treat in one of the two containers on the other side of you.**
8. **As your dog gets better at this game, try varying the container style to make it more difficult.**
9. **This game allows your dog to use his nose and forage for food.**

PUZZLE TOYS

Watch the video at

https://youtu.be/oY_f7YbKnxl



1. **This is a game that should be played inside or outside on the porch.**
2. **This game requires only one person to play.**
3. **Puzzle toys like this one can be found at most pet stores in the area.**
4. **Put one small treat in each compartment of the puzzle toy.**
5. **For the first time, make it easy for your dog to succeed by not closing the compartment all the way. You can also show your dog how it works.**
6. **Never leave your dog unattended with these toys. They are durable, but not indestructible.**

SOCGER & PUSHBALL

Watch the video at

<https://youtu.be/ZfdyMcyRTIY>

Many dogs love a good game of ball. There are some balls that work very well for this (like tennis balls, basketballs and soccer balls) and some that should never be used (like golf balls).



The best balls for dogs to play with are not likely to being punctured. Stay away from thin-surface balls and stick to tougher ones that are meant for sports.

There is now a dog sport called “Treibball” (which means “push ball” in German), in which dogs push a giant physio ball into a net. Teamworks has a course for teaching this skill so that the dog learns to push, and not bite the ball.

