



Teaching Tug

TRAINING TIPS

A GAME OF COOPERATION

Often called "tug-of-war", tug is actually a game of cooperation. It takes two to tug, each responding to the actions of the other. Some trainers and dog training books recommend against teaching tug, but I love this game as a way to teach impulse control, as well as helping your dog build a terrific behavior of releasing objects she is holding in her mouth.

You'll want to have a few rules in place in order for this to be a good game for you and your dog.

- Have a verbal cue that means the game is beginning, such as "Tug".
- Say your cue, and present the tug toy in an appealing way, such as shaking it enticingly along the ground.
- Once your dog is engaged, tug back-and-forth, being sensitive to the amount of pull that's comfortable for your dog.
- Tug left and right, not up-and-down, to minimize the stress on your dog's neck.
- Every now and again simply stop pulling.
 - If your dog releases the tug toy on her own. Say "Yes!", and resume the game by saying "Tug", and moving the toy enticingly.
 - If your dog doesn't release the toy, ask her to "Trade", or "Give", saying the cue only once. Help her by putting a smelly, tasty, treat right in front of her nose, and when she opens her mouth to take the treat say "Yes!". Resume the game by saying "Tug", and moving the toy enticingly.
- Sometimes release the toy for your dog to enjoy on her own. When she comes back with the toy, either resume the game by saying "Tug" and moving the toy enticingly, or ask her to "Trade" or "Give", using a treat if necessary, then resume the game.
- At the end of the game trade for something she really likes such as a bully stick or chew toy.

Troubleshooting tips:

If your dog tends to "climb" the toy with her mouth, you have a couple of choices:

1. Stop the game for a minute or so and remove your attention from her when she has climbed too high, or
2. Simply grab the other end of the tug to maintain the length of toy between your hand and her mouth.

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If her teeth touch your skin, even by mistake:

1. Do not scold.
2. Stop the game for a minute or so and remove your attention from her.
3. If this happens again, stop the game for several minutes, or end the play session.

Engagement with you during play, and the shared enjoyment of the game, are very rewarding for your dog. If she learns that certain actions such as climbing up the tug toy or putting her teeth on you make the game stop, she will begin to avoid doing those things so that the game can continue. Some trainers like to mark the behavior that makes the fun stop with a simple “oops” or similar neutral word.

If your dog is too aroused to learn to “Trade” or “Give” in the middle of a tug game, teach her to Trade or Drop using the techniques described in our handouts before you add the tug game to her repertoire:

Teaching Trade: <http://joyfuldogllc.com/jd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Teaching-Trade.pdf>

Teaching A Drop: <http://joyfuldogllc.com/jd/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/teaching-drop.pdf>