Dane County Humane Society
Helping People Help Animals

Tug
Impulse Control

Objective:

Teaching dogs to tug in a structured way is a great way to teach impulse control and burn off excess energy. Structured tug training teaches dogs how to quickly come down from an aroused state, how to use their mouth appropriately, how to wait for permission to engage in play with you, and how to drop objects on cue.

What You Will Need:

- Leash
- Long soft tug toy such as a rope or braided fleece
- Treats and/or a second toy

Rules:

- Never let the dog initiate the game, they must wait for the 'tug' cue
- Never allow the dog to tug for more than 20 seconds without taking a break
- Dogs can only continue to play tug if they 'drop' the toy when asked
- The game should end if the dog's mouth makes contact with your skin

How to Train Structured Tug:

Work in an enclosed area such as a fenced in yard or a large room. Attach a leash to their flat collar and step on the leash to prevent them from jumping, but also make sure they have enough slack so that they can stand comfortably.

- Holding the tug toy with both hands, one at each end, present the tug toy high above the dog's head.
- If the dog goes to jump for the toy put the tug toy behind your back until they stop trying to jump for the tug toy.
- Once the dog has quit jumping for the toy, present the toy again.
- Slowly lower the toy towards the dogs head, stopping to put the toy behind your back each time the dog attempts to jump up towards the toy.
- Once the dog stops attempting to jump, say 'tug', and pop the tug toy in the dog's mouth.
    1. When you present the toy for the dog, make sure to grasp the rope with one hand at each end of the rope.
    2. You should present the center of the rope for the dog to grab; this is why it is important to have a long tug toy so that your hands are safely out of the dog's reach.
- Play tug with the dog for 10-20 seconds
    1. Make sure to use gentle consistent tugging, not jerky fast movements which could injure the dog's neck.
    2. Once the dog is tugging on the toy you can take your foot off the leash so that the dog can tug freely.

How To Teach Drop It:

- Just before you end the tug session step on the leash so that, once again, the dog can stand comfortably but not jump.
- Say 'Drop' in a clear even tone and immediately let your arm go limp so that the dog no longer has any resistance to tug against.
    1. The dog can also not run away with the tug toy because you will have him anchored in place with the leash.

- With your free hand place a tasty treat at the dogs' nose, most dogs will immediately drop the tug toy for the treat.
    1. If not you can wait the dog out, after all if you are standing on the leash, and toy is held loosely in his mouth, it simply isn't fun for the dog so he will eventually drop the toy.
    2. Sometimes asking the dog to 'sit' or covering the dogs' eyes with your hand will prompt the dog to drop the tug toy.
    3. You can also trade the dog for another toy if the other methods are not successful.
- Regardless of how you get the dog to drop the toy you should immediately present the rope and say 'tug' as soon as the dog drops the tug toy.
    1. This will teach the dog that the only way to continue the game is to drop the tug toy when he is prompted to do so.

Advancing the Dog's Skills:

- After the dog begins to reliably drop the tug toy when you say 'drop' you can fade out the use of the treat or other methods used to encourage the dog to drop the tug toy.
- At this point you should also begin to make the tug toy more enticing before giving the 'tug' command by lowering it close to the dog's head, moving the toy in slow motion or in a quick bouncy motion. Make sure you are doing this in a controlled way so that you are confident you can safely move the tug toy away if the dog were to jump for it before you said 'tug.' This is where dogs can learn some great impulse control. Eventually you can shake the tug toy right in a seasoned dog's face and pull it in and out of their smiling open mouth without them clamping down until they hear the word, 'tug.'

Important Rules

If the dog ever re-grips and their teeth come in contact with your skin, shriek as if it really hurt, even if it didn't hurt, and immediately stop playing the game. Either leave the room, or turn your back to the dog for a 30 second time out. After the time out resume the game as normal. But if the dog's teeth come in contact with you more than 3 times in one session the game should be ended for that day.

If the dog lets go of the tug toy before you ask them to, either immediately say 'tug' and reoffer the toy or pull the toy away and put it behind your back. The latter will give you another opportunity to work on impulse control as you lower the toy towards the dog. However, if you aren't stepping on their leash and you think the dog is going to be too fast and is going to grab for the toy before you can get it safely behind your back you should choose option one; immediately reoffering the toy, to avoid the risk of being inadvertently bitten if you are moving the toy away as the dog is jumping for it.