

Using Play As A Reinforcer For Obedience, Self-Control, Exercise And Touch Desensitization:

Toys are a great reinforcer because they make you the center of all good games. When you play - it is interactive making you an important part of the reinforcement. Dogs love games. They love social interaction. What the dog loves to do is an important reinforcer.

How to use tugging, wrestling, body contact games with puppies: Start your play relationship immediately with your new puppy. Your puppy/dog is trying to play when he jumps on you or bites your pant leg or bites and tugs the leash or chews your hand. Play training is a way to show and teach him the games that you and he can play together. Sit on the floor with a soft ball, some old towel torn lengthwise pieces, a small squeaky toy, an empty plastic soda bottle, a soft cloth toy and a rope with a piece of cloth tied to the end. Have some wonderful smelly treats sitting in a dish out of reach of your puppy but within your reach. Now quietly offer one of the objects to your puppy, see what he does with it. If he takes it off then throw out the rope fabric so you lure him to your rope bait and then can pull him back to you. Exchange for a smelly piece of food (click or say yes) and toss your toy. If your puppy likes to hold and tug, let him for a while. Pull the puppy around and over you gently remember he has puppy baby teeth you don't want to hurt him. While the puppy is holding on, pat him all over, including paws. If he lets go to try to bite your hand, quickly pick up another toy to distract him then repeat but don't go as far down his leg stop just shy of where he let go. After you have done this a few times try and go a bit further down the leg again stop before he lets go!

Too rough? If your dog is too rough, is losing self control, is just plain hurting you - say "ouch" loudly and stop playing. The moment he backs off, click or say yes and treat with food, and then start playing again. Manage the tempo of your play, try to find the right moment to break off before your puppy loses self-control and food reward or soft gentle calm petting. Saying Gooood. Don't jazz him up. Keep the play calm and steady. We want to touch and pet, the puppy wants to play – combine them to create a fun time to be together.

Ending the game:

Always stop playing before your dog is bored/tired. When you are finished with the game use a clear word and body cue to tell the dog that it's over. "We're finished" Stand up straight, put the toy away - trading it for food. Show him your hands are empty. Then turn and walk away. Don't let yourself be drawn back into the game. If your puppy won't quit, have a stuffed bone or Kong to give him to distract him from you. If he is still wound up then put him away in his crate with the Kong or chew toy.

Once your puppy/dog knows that releasing the toy gets food and more play you can use the toy in your hand as a "lure" for obedience skills like sit and down and stay.

How to get your dog to play running games WITH you:

Watch how dogs get other dogs to play. They tease each other. They play hard to get. They play keep away. You can't get good play with out being interactive. You have to figure out how to get your dog to believe he has tricked you into giving him the toy. You must be willing in the beginning to let your dog push at you to get the toy. Don't push the toy at the dog. The toy that the dog can't quite get is MUCH more desirable than the toy you are trying to push into their mouth. Remember dogs believe "*what's yours should be mine*". **Play hard to get!** Appear to be having fun with the toy all by yourself. Let the dog "press" you to play, don't press the dog. Have at least 2, but even better, three or four of exactly the same ball. Start by playing with the ball by yourself, tossing it, making noise, and having fun. When the dog comes in to see what the toy is and then to try to get it, make it possible for the dog to try for the toy, but make getting it from you fun. You should be fluid - bending away and then towards the dog depending on what draws the dog into you. If your dog likes to chase, as he is trying to get the toy from you (maybe climbing up your chest) throw it. (If your dog is shy about playing then don't correct any

body contact they make when playing at the beginning. As the shy dog gets bold, then you can begin to require that they sit before getting the toy. If your dog is a wild guy and needs to climb all over you to get the toy, then you need to cover the toy with your hand close to your body and insist on a sit or down before playing. Leave the leash on and step on it to show him what he has to do before he gets to play.) Then once the dog has the toy, you produce another and play with that one. Convince the dog that the one you have now is even better. And you will have the beginning of a retrieve.

If your dog is a tugger, let him get a hold of the toy as he presses you for it, tug and pull and play, then let him take it from you and win. Produce another tug toy and play with it yourself. The dog can't have the new toy till he drops the old one. Remember, no compulsion, just wily teasing on your part. The instant the toy is dropped, mark it with "yes" and give him the new toy. **Always stop playing before your dog is bored/tired.** While playing tug, I usually move the tug toy in an up and down motion - a "bouncy, bouncy" motion. Don't jerk fast, hard, or side-to-side. You want to prevent any whiplash type injury and you want to keep your dog from "killing" the toy. Now let's have some real fun with our dogs!!