



TUG-O-WAR....AND ITS RULES

“Tug-O-War”, from your dog’s point of view, isn’t a game. In his view, it’s a partnership with you to make “a kill”. It’s not about dominance. The tug activity is a portion of the hunting sequence seen in carnivores pulling apart their prey. So, it **shouldn’t** be an activity in which **children** participate. Only those people who are capable of implementing the rules should be allowed to play.

“Tug-O-War” is a tremendous energy burner and great exercise. Use it as a break in obedience training, building enthusiasm, increasing focus or as a reward to your dog for doing a good job. “Tug-O-War” is a good gauge of how well your dog responds to you. Since “Tug-O-War” is a physical and interactive game, it’s important that you teach your dog the rules.

Time is on your side: You determine when the game starts and ends.

- ✚ To teach your dog this rule, start play by enticing him to pull on the toy.
- ✚ Use a key word or phrase in a playful voice, such as “**TUG**” or “**GET IT**”.
- ✚ Use a specific toy for “Tug-O-War”.
- ✚ Present the toy, along with your special words, to trigger the start of the game.

Your dog releases the toy on cue:

- ❖ Teach your dog the meaning of “**DROP IT**”, “**GIVE**” or “**OUT**”.
- ❖ Practice by having your dog release other objects such as squeaky toys or balls.
- ❖ Say “**GIVE**”, when your dog drops the object, positively reinforce the behavior. The payoff can be a treat, praise or continued play with the toy.
- ❖ Once the object is dropped, don’t allow him to take it again unless **YOU** offer it.

Biting is not allowed: This command is a prerequisite before going further.

- If the dog’s mouth comes into contact with your hand, even accidentally, end the game immediately.
- Do this by yelling “**OUCH**” even if it didn’t hurt, dropping the toy, stopping the play or leaving.
- Once the object is dropped, don’t allow him to take it again unless **YOU** offer it.

- By removing his source of fun, he learns to control what he does with his mouth.

What if your dog is difficult to engage in play?

The object is to get him to touch, take, hold and hang onto the object, in succession. In order for the dog's confidence to be built up, you should praise him profusely every step of the way. Even reluctant tuggers can be turned around with this approach. Once they learn this game, it is tremendous fun and a pleasurable experience the dog will associate with you.

Fearful or shy dogs:

"Tug-O-War" is a great game to build confidence in dogs that are fearful or shy. Changing the rules a bit and letting them "WIN" once in a while can actually help them build self-confidence.