



Rules with toys

HALL VETERINARY SURGERY BEHAVIOUR ADVICE

There are many benefits of teaching your pup how to play with toys. It strengthens the relationship between you and the pup; it provides great exercise for the pup; improves your pup's recall; allows you the opportunity to teach the pup to share; allow you to teach the pup how to have polite mouth manners and is a way of teaching the pup that games have an end-point. Below are some steps to teach a pup to fetch and give a toy.

STEP 1: Start by playing a simple and fun game with the pup. In a small room free from any distractions, sit down on the floor with your pup. Have a small squeaky toy in your hand and some tasty treats in your other hand. Toss the toy a small distance (still within your reach) from yourself and let your puppy pounce on it. While the pup has the toy in its mouth, hold a food treat just in front of its nose and wait for the pup to drop the toy - praise your dog and give him the treat as soon as the toy drops from its mouth. Practice this simple game in 5 minute blocks, at least a couple of times a day. This is the crucial first step towards developing a solid and reliable fetch or retrieve in your pup.

STEP 2: Continue the game played in Step 1 but now add a release word or cue to the exercise. As you are taking the toy from your puppy's mouth (or when he drops it in your lap) say 'Ta' or 'Give' and immediately give the treat and praise. Repeat this process many times. You are building an association in your pup's mind between the 'Ta' cue and the act of the pup giving the toy to you. After plenty of practice and continual reinforcement (the treats) you will not have to grab the toy from your pup's mouth, he will give it to you upon hearing your cue word.

STEP 3: Now we can slowly (very slowly) increase the distance of the retrieve. Start out by throwing the toy a couple of metres from you – hopefully your pup will continue to pounce on the toy and bring it back to you for his treat. Continue just as you have been, say your release cue 'Ta' and give the treat for every successful retrieve.

IMPORTANT: If at any time your dog does not bring the toy back to you do not chase him or make a fuss. Use a second toy to get your pup's attention and get the pup back to you. Your aim is to make it clear to your dog that in order for the fun and games to continue he must bring the toy back to you. Never chase the pup to get the toy.

STEP 4: Continue practicing this game of fetch over and over. Repetition and positive reinforcement are the keys to building and strengthening a solid retrieve. You can now mix up the distance you throw the toy and take your training sessions into different rooms within the house. When you introduce a new object such as a ball to the game you need to start out again at a short distance and increase the distance slowly. Only ever treat and praise your puppy when the retrieve object gets delivered directly to you.

STEP 5: If you like you can now add a cue at the start of the exercise. Simply say 'fetch' or 'get it' just before you throw the ball. You can also gradually fade the treats now. The game itself will be reward enough for your pup. Instead of a tasty treat being your dog's motivation, the next throw of the ball will be enough of an incentive for it to bring the ball straight back to you.

STEP 6: Teach your pup that all games have an end point. When you reach the end of play time, put the toy away and create a hand-signal and associated word cue to let the pup now its all over. Some common word cues are 'Finish', 'That's It', 'All Gone'.



FIND A TOY YOUR PUP LIKES AND TEACH THE 'GIVE' FIRST



WHEN ENGAGED IN TUGGING, STOP TUGGING & PUT A TREAT ON THE PUP'S NOSE, THEY DROP THE TOY TO GET THE TREAT.



MAKE SURE YOUR PUP LIKES THE TOY, HAVE TWO TOYS SO YOU CAN TRADE UP, AND START WITH VERY LITTLE DISTANCE.