



PARKSIDE

CLIENT INFORMATION HANDOUT

TRACKING GAMES

All dogs have a great sense of smell and they love to use it. Most dogs spend a lot of their free time when they are awake exploring their surroundings using their nose. The following games try making use of this well developed sense to inject a bit of fun that both the dog and you the owner can enjoy. Games also help to alleviate boredom while at the same time increase the bond between dog and owner.

WORK FOR YOUR DINNER:

- All too often we feed our pets in a bowl which we place in front of them. This may be once or twice per day and usually lasts for a few minutes (read seconds for labs & retrievers). Dogs enjoy their food but maybe they would enjoy it better if they had to go and look for it. After all as people one of the enjoyments of going out for a meal is the anticipation that the wait between the ordering and the arrival of the food gives us. This game can be played either inside or outside but if you want to limit the slobber in the house, outside might be the better option. Any family member can do this, the food used for this game must be dry.
 1. Feed a small amount of his regular food in the bowl.
 2. Keep the rest of the food aside for when you play the game.
 3. Take this part of the dog's meal outside with you prior to starting the game.
 4. Scatter the food around outside near to the back door.
 5. Return inside.
 6. Before opening the door get the dog to SIT & WAIT.
 7. Open the door at the same time and then give the command "SEEK".

At first you will have to go out with the dog and point out a few pieces of food. The first time you do this scatter the food in a small area so the dog can find it easily. Each time he finishes a piece say "SEEK" so he gets the association between the word and looking for the food. Once he gets the idea you should be able to scatter the food all around the garden while leaving the dog to search for himself. Remember part of the fun is the anticipation so you should try to increase his wait time with the door open. At first you may have to hold his collar to insist on the wait or close the door quickly, which you do will depend on your dog. The upside of this game is it is fun for the dog and at the same time provides you with a training opportunity that will increase your level of control with the dog. After all training can be fun for both you and your dog.

FIND THE TOY

The object of this game is to find the toy. When you first play this game you will need two people, one to hide the toy and the other to hold on to the dog.

1. Show the dog the toy
2. Hold on to the dog while the toy is hidden
3. Allow the dog to watch the hiding process. Once he gets the idea keep the dog in another room until the toy is hidden
4. Give the command 'find it' and release the dog
5. Go with the dog pointing out possible places
6. Once he finds lavish praise with or without a titbit

Most dogs have a favourite toy so it is best to start with this toy. Use any command you want but avoid using too many words or a command you use in other contexts. When you first start playing this game it helps if you hid a titbit with the toy so the dog gets a double reward when he finds it. As the dog gets better at the game you can decrease the frequency with which you hid a titbit then replace this with the occasional titbit from you when he does find it.

Again as stated above, start with an easy hiding place in one room and progress to harder places in other rooms. You may also find that you can work on the dog's WAIT so much so that eventually you will be able to command the dog to WAIT while you hide the toy then call him to FIND when you are ready.

HIDE AND SEEK

This is a particular favourite of mine and had been my way of training my dogs to look behind doors, after all, where else do burglars hide!

This is played almost exactly as Find the Toy but replace the toy with a person. This game is a particular favourite with children when they play with other children and certainly from watching my own children it seems to be a lot more fun when the dog play's as well. Use a similar command either 'FIND THEM' or 'FIND (SPECIFIC NAME)'. At first you will have to get someone to hold the dog and then take the dog to find them, but as the dog gets the idea you should be able to let it go on its own. Again you could use this as an ideal way to increase your control over the dog by working on the WAIT.

FOLLOW THE TRACK

The aim of this game is to get the dog to follow a specific track to find his reward. This game is particularly good for all gun dogs but may not be a hit with Collies or Terriers, Whatever your dog is try it and see. This is a particularly good game for getting the dog to use its brain as well as its nose. The game needs to be taken in easy stages so you are sure the dog is following the track with his nose and not just memorising your route.

1. Either tie the dog up or get someone to hold him. Scuffing your feet along the grass mark out a trail running straight from where the dog is. At intervals drop a small biscuit on you trail. At the end of the trail add a few biscuits.
2. Return to the dog, release him saying 'TRACK'. Go with him at first pointing the route.
3. When he reaches the end of the track be lavish with your praise.

Repeat this game at this level on a number of occasions over a number of days, and then introduce a change in direction. The simplest shape for you to mark accurately is an 'L' shape. Again scuff the grass, place titbits and allow the dog to watch.

Once you are confident that the dog is doing this try keeping the shape the same but don't allow the dog to watch. The first time you do this you may need to point out the start to him.

Depending on how well the dog does and his enjoyment of the game you can develop the track further making it more complex. Scuffing your feet helps to increase your scent but will not be necessary once the dog has the idea. Initially the game will be played in your garden but later on as the dog's ability to track improves you can do this out on walks, in parks etc.

Remember before you move on to each new stage the dog needs to be able to track the scent without any titbits on the actual track. If you find your dog is heading straight for the end without following the track then maybe this is not the game for him.

POINTS TO NOTE:

1. **WHEN TO PLAY:** If the dog is tired, just eaten or just not interested then try another time. You need to have his full attention. Watch your dog's reaction. Don't play longer than he is interested. It is better to stop while he is still keen to go on. When you have finished the game make sure the dog has won the last game. Finishing with a poor performance may make the dog reluctant to play next time.
2. **PROGRESSION OF THE GAME:** Don't rush this along too fast. If you do, you risk losing everything the dog has learned about the game by confusing him. In any session you should have some easy games and some more difficult games. This helps keep the dog interested while at the same time allows you to monitor his progress.
3. **REWARD:** Rewards can be anything it will depend on the dog. Food, toys and attention from you are the most obvious. With regard to food, dry dog food taken from his daily ration is easiest. However you need to have a 'jackpot' to reward any performance which is exceptional. These jackpots are any food the dog values highly. It will depend on you dog but common examples are cheese, dried liver, smoked sausage. The reward size needs to be small. If the dog takes too long to eat each bit he may forget why he was rewarded and also will quickly become full and hence less interested.
4. **TIMING OF THE REWARD:** For the dog to develop an association between the treat and the behaviour he must receive the reward as soon as possible. Preferably within 1 second.
5. **COMMANDS:** Use whatever words you like, the words used here are only examples

Keep the words short and few. Be specific and make sure everyone in the family understands what the word means and when to use it. If family members are unclear then the dog will become confused.

HAVE FUN: After all this is what these games are about and it is part of the reason you have a dog. You may also find that once you start playing these games that the dog become's more attentive and obedient at other times as well. This is because by encouraging the dog to play you have inadvertently made yourself more fun to the dog. Also by being the initiator of these games you are acting as leader to the dog, something of greater significance to an animal whose behaviour has been developed for pack life. It is this pack life behaviour that had made the dog such a good companion in the domestic environment.

By establishing yourself as leader in play you will find the dog more likely to look to you to lead in other areas of his life. Hence the bond between dog and owner is strengthened and hopefully having a dog as a pet is more enjoyable for everyone.

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