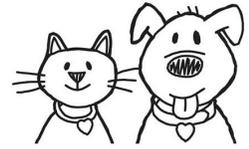




Resources for Pet Owners



Tug of War: An Enrichment Activity

Tug of war can be a fun rewarding activity for you and your dog. It used to be said that playing tug of war with your dog will make them dominant and aggressive. It is true that letting your dog decide when they play and how long they play can make them more likely to have dominant behaviors, if you follow the rules outlined here, you can have a new fun game to play together.

Rules

- To play tug you first must teach the dog to release the toy. Use a command such as "take it" to signal the dog that they can take the toy and "out" to give up the toy. Teaching them to take it should be fairly easy. Say "take it" and gently pull back when they do. Praise them for touching the toy with their mouth. To get them to release the toy, show the dog a tasty food treat and when they drop it, give the dog the treat. This will teach them that you are not stealing the toy, but rather trading them for something better. If you are unable to do this on your own, consult a trainer.
- Select a toy that will be safe for the dog. Rope toys can rip the dog's gums and stuffed animals can tear open, injuring the dog's neck. There are special toys designed to use with tug of war. Make sure the size and material is safe for your dog's size and breed.
- You always initiate a game of tug. The tug toy will be kept out of reach of the dog until you are able to play. This should be a special toy that you control. If your dog is not interested in playing tug do not tease them to incite play. Praise them if they do decide to grip the toy.
- The game is over if their teeth touch your skin. Scream "ouch" and put the toy out of sight for 10 seconds. Resume play after the dog has calmed down. If they put their teeth on you again, the game is over until the next day.
- Only play when your dog seems interested in the game. If the dog gets bored, trade the toy for a treat and put it away until your next play session.
- Take obedience breaks. Make the dog do several "outs" in a play session and make them sit, down or roll over before they can re-grip. This is a great way to reward obedience without having to use food.

Important Safety Precautions

- Never play tug with a dog that has a history of biting or does not have good bite inhibition.
- Do not allow young children to play tug with the dog.
- Everyone in the family must follow the rules of the game. No one should continually tease the dog.
- Do not play tug with a dog that will not "out" or growls when you go near its toys.
- Never try to rip the toy out of the dog's mouth. They will grip the toy harder and you might damage the dog's teeth.
- Do not play tug with a dog that already has dominant tendencies. Consult a behaviorist. See handout "Nothing in Life is Free."