

Tug o' War Rules

For years we have been told not to play tug 'o war with our dogs. We were told it would make them aggressive & we'd end up getting bitten. Yet, many of us played it anyway with no problems. How come? Well, because most of us played by the rules, even if unknowingly. And if you play by the rules, tug games are not only acceptable but should be encouraged as a great way to play with your dog!

Tug games provide great exercise (for both of you) and can be played inside in a small area. Quick games of tug are great rewards for obedience training, too! However, there are some very important rules which **MUST** be followed. If you don't, you may very well up with a dog that becomes unacceptably aggressive.

Be cautioned, as well, that I still don't recommend tug games for dogs that are already showing aggression toward their owners! But for the average pet who isn't having dominance issues at home, tug games are great.

The Rules

1. Choose a single toy to use for your tug games. Use only it until all of the rules are clearly understood by all involved. Store this toy somewhere out of the dog's reach - just bring it out on those special occasions when you want to play tug!
2. Begin each game with a command such as "Wanna tug?".
3. Teach your dog to release the toy on command. You can teach this command ("Drop" or "Give") by offering a treat or another special toy in exchange for the tug toy. Do again & again until he learns the command. Be patient! After he releases, praise him & give him the treat or toy, but then quickly initiate another game of tug. Your dog is much more likely to give up the toy easily if he knows there is a good chance he will get it right back! Until this is taught, you might be able to get the tug toy by pressing the dog's lips against his teeth - when it gets uncomfortable he will let go! Of course, do **NOT** try this if you are worried about getting bitten - only you can judge the situation with your own dog.
4. Failing to give the toy causes a recess in the game. Running away or guarding the toy ends the game once the owner has regained possession of the toy. Don't chase your dog to get the toy! That is way too much fun for him. Ignore him for a while, then direct his attention to another activity & remove the tug toy when he leaves it.
5. Take frequent breaks for some basic obedience commands (sit, down, or tricks of some sort). As a reward for the obedience, the tug game continues.
6. Any time the dog grabs the toy without permission ("Wanna tug?"), there is a recess of the game or end of it if the dog becomes really rowdy.
7. Dogs really have very exacting control over their teeth. The dog must **NEVER** even "accidentally" touch the owner's hand with its teeth while playing. If this should happen, end the game immediately & ignore the dog for a few minutes. You **CAN** expect the dog to growl quite ferociously while tugging - that's part of the game & perfectly okay as long as those teeth don't touch you!
8. Children of any age who cannot enforce these rules **MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO PLAY TUG WITH THE DOG!!** Dogs and children should always be closely supervised.

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*using positive methods to teach people how to teach their pets!