



IS IT OK TO PLAY TUGGY GAMES?

Many owners are apprehensive about playing tuggy games with their dog. This is a pity. A game of tuggy provides great physical exercise and it teaches the dog valuable lessons of self-control in an excitable situation. It should be FUN - but only if you PLAY SAFE.

A tuggy game is one of the highest level rewards you can offer, but it can get out of hand very quickly unless you apply common sense rules:-

RULE 1. Do no harm.

In a test of strength, you are more likely to come off worse than the dog!

Hold the tuggy safely - keep arms straight as much as possible, and maintain a straight back (use a long tuggy with a small dog).

Build the dog's strength slowly and avoid sudden sharp snappy movements.

Use a soft toy as hard rope can cause bleeding gums.

RULE 2. No snatching.

Good manners, or self-control, is essential. Just because the toy is in view is not permission for the dog to jump up and grab it. This is an offence that puts many people off tuggy games.

Keep relaxed, bring the toy into view...you are looking for the dog to maintain self-control whilst looking at the tuggy (Hiding it makes things worse). It doesn't matter if the dog is sitting, standing or lying down, but NO barking or jumping up... Good - give the cue 'Get it'. If your dog does jump up calmly bring the toy tight to your chest and wait for the dog to offer something more acceptable. DO NOT raise the toy up in the air out of reach or you will encourage the dog to jump up.

RULE 3. The ON switch. Hold when told to hold.

When your dog has learnt that snatching never works, you can teach the 'Get it' cue as above. You can use this when the toy is in plain view, on the floor or even in the toy box. The presence of the toy is never a cue to grab - only when you add the command 'Get it' or whatever word you choose.

RULE 4. The OFF switch. Let go when told to Give.

Leaving go of the tuggy is every bit as important as the 'get it' cue.

For serious grippers, hold a piece of food to the dog's nostrils whilst they are holding on. Just keep very still and let the dog decide whether or not it is worth letting go. As soon as the dog releases its grip, add the 'Give' cue and offer the treat. Soon the cue will be associated with the action of releasing the item which will then be rewarded with another game or a treat.

Preventing possession

PLEASE do not grab or prise toys out of your dog's mouth as this is likely to increase possessiveness. If you have been advised that "you must be able to take things away from your dog" then just consider the following.

Imagine that every time Uncle Joe came up to you he took away your lap top "just to make sure he could take anything away" from you. How would you respond? It is likely that eventually you will get wise to the approach of Uncle Joe and start guarding your laptop holding on tight to it for dear life. Imagine then that he tries to prise it out of your fingers how would you react? Would you let go this time and just make sure he doesn't get close enough next time or would you enter into a fight and defend your computer? What ever your choice why do we expect our dogs to react any differently. If a dog associates humans approaching and hands with removal of their resources they are likely to start guarding these items.

The best plan of action is prevention by carrying out the swap and 'give' lesson as described above. Investing time in teaching a 'give' or 'drop' will prevent any possession problems and guarding behaviour - which will be time well spent.

RULE 5. Mind your bite.

Sometimes the dog's passion for the game will result in it getting too close to your fingers. If the dog's teeth make contact with your skin - albeit accidentally - the **GAME ENDS** immediately. No excuses. Let go instantly, leave the dog with the toy, and leave the room (or walk away). Do NOT scold the dog.

Keep to the rules and enjoy loads of fun with your dog.