**Chapter 17: Playing with Your Dog**

This chapter will highlight the value in providing adequate play time for your dog, including precautions for safe play and how to get the most out of each play session. Playing with your new dog is not just a fun way to kill time, it is an important component of building a strong relationship. Play provides an essential outlet for excess energy and stress relief. You should strive to provide some type of play for your dog every day.

First things first, you must keep your dog safe to the best of your ability, especially if you choose to play outdoors. This means that you will need a secure indoor area, fully enclosed fenced yard or other securely fenced area. Otherwise, you will need to employ the use of a long line. A long line is simply a very long leash, ranging from 10’-100’, and typically made from rope, cotton web, or synthetic material. The long line acts as a safety net, allowing your dog space to run a bit, while ensuring that you remain physically connected to them. Using the long line is a skill that does require some practice. It is easy to trip on it or get it tangled around your feet.yourself against a wall or fence line can help prevent the dog from wrapping the line around you, but it will take some practice to get a feel for it. You will have opportunity to practice using one while here at school, and your instructors will be more than happy to give you some pointers for safe use.

Whether you choose to use a long line, fenced yard, or indoor play area, it is still vitally important to continue to work on a strong recall with your dog. This should be practiced every day beginning at short distances and building up. Call your dog using his or her name and the command “Come!” Use a happy and excited tone of voice, clap your hands or pat your thighs as you back up slightly to encourage you dog to come toward you. Offer food reward when your dog makes contact. You can also practice getting a hold of their collar before giving food reward, then releasing the collar. By repeating this many times, you will build a positive association for the dog and they will want to come to you. If you only call your dog when playtime is over or when they are doing something you don’t like, they will quickly decide that coming to you is no fun and become more and more reluctant to do so.

During class, Alumni Hall will be made available for individual play with your dog. Your instructor will observe the first few minutes of your initial play session, then it will be up to you to continue to provide daily playtime for your dog. The Grooming Room can also be used for play if you prefer a smaller area. In addition, you may have opportunity to utilize an outdoor fenced area for play. This is typically reserved for use later in class once everyone has established good control and handling skills. It may not be available depending on weather. Your instructors will communicate which areas are available for play.

It will be very important, especially in the beginning, to be aware of your dog's park schedule when planning play times. Often, a little bit of freedom and activity will stimulate them to want to relieve. It’s a good idea to always park your dog just prior to playing, as well as immediately after. If your dog is not yet fully adjusted to using the park area, try to wait until after a successful park time.

As mentioned earlier, your inaugural play time will be facilitated by instructors. We’ll show you a long line and have you clip it to the dead ring of your dog's collar. When using the long line, it’s best to keep it untangled and off the floor as much as possible, but avoid wrapping it around your hands. Dogs can get a lot of momentum going and you can be easily injured if they hit the end of the line when you're not prepared. We’ll have you practice with the long line a bit while your dog starts to explore the room, then we’ll ask you to call your dog back to you several times. Make sure you have plenty of food reward with you. You may have to work at it a bit to make yourself the most interesting thing in the room. Use food reward and plenty of praise any time your dog returns to you. Once you can successfully call your dog back, we will give you a box with a variety of toys in it. There may be Nylabones, balls, tug toys, soft toys, rubber toys, squeaky toys and more. Most of these toys are intended for supervised interactive play only, meaning you need to be aware of what your dog is doing with them. If you find that your dog is inclined to hunker down in a corner and destroy a particular toy, you’ll need to remove that toy and try to get them interested in a more interactive game. You can experiment with different types of toys to discover what your dog enjoys most. Initially, they may take any toy and run laps around the room for a few minutes, leaping and cavorting. This initial silliness is totally normal and can be quite entertaining! Once your dog seems finished with that, you’ll want to find some kind of interactive game to engage them in. Every dog has a different level of play drive. Some will happily play fetch for hours, while some will prefer other games or would rather simply chew a bone. Remember that playtime should be enjoyable for both of you, so it is important to figure out what they like to do so you can enjoy that activity together. It can take some time to figure out the best way to play with your dog, but the most important thing is to have some fun and enjoy unstructured time together with minimal expectations.

**Suggested Games to Try**

* Fetch (Retrieving) - Many dogs will participate in some form of fetch game, though it is not something they are officially trained to do. Try rolling a toy across the floor to your dog, making sure to keep it low to the ground, and encourage them to go after it. If they pick up the toy, start encouraging them to come back to you. You can use the command “Out” to ask your dog to drop the toy, and reward with food when they do so. If your dog really enjoys the game, they will be motivated to bring the toy back to you just so you can throw it again. With practice, you may be able to get them to drop the toy right into your hands.
* Follow me – If you’re comfortable moving about in the space, this can be a really fun game, especially for dogs that are less interested in toys. Start by simply walking around the room. Try to move with purpose and don’t worry about what your dog is doing. After a minute or so, call your dog to you. Give plenty of happy praise and reward with food, then continue walking. Repeat a couple of times and soon enough you will likely find your dog following you! Have a little party and a treat whenever they “catch” you. Try moving faster or slower, in different directions, stop abruptly, etc. and see what your dog does.
* Tug – This game is a bit more physical for the human, but many dogs do enjoy it. Tug games work best with a long soft toy, ideally one made specifically for that purpose. Hold onto one end of the toy and offer the other end to your dog. Move or shake the toy to encourage them to take hold of it. If your dog enjoys this game, you may need to set some boundaries, so they don’t get too intense. Dogs can be very strong when they have a mind to be. Periodically stop the game by bringing your own energy way down, becoming very still and holding the toy still. Use the command “Out” to get your dog to let go of the toy. You can then reward with food, or just offer the toy back to the dog for another round. Do this multiple times during a play session, not just when the game is over. You can also let your dog “win” occasionally. They may bring the toy right back to you for more tugging.
* Off-Leash obedience – This might not sound like a game, exactly, but it can be a fun way to engage your dog in a positive manner. With no leash attaching your dog to you, you’ll have to rely more heavily on your relationship with your dog. Try asking for behaviors like Sit, Down, or Heel, and see how your dog responds. This can also be combined with other games that your dog enjoys. For example, you could ask for a Down, then when you dog complies you can toss his toy as a reward. You might also practice having your dog stay for longer periods or at a further distance than you typically would. Always return to your dog to reward the Stay behavior.
* Hide and Seek – This one is a little more fun at home where you can move into different rooms, but you can start teaching it to your dog while you are in class. Have your dog stay and move away from her, then call her to you and have a big praise party when she “finds” you. Keep it easy for the dog at first so they understand the game. As they get good at it you can challenge them by moving around a corner, into another room, behind a door, etc.
* Find your toy – You may notice that your dog enjoys chasing a toy when you toss it out but doesn’t seem inclined to bring it back to you. This might seem pretty annoying at first, but it's much more entertaining if you make a game out of it! Let’s say Juno has left her toy in the middle of the floor. You know it’s out there somewhere. Engage your dog in the search by encouraging her with phrases like “Get your toy! Find it!” If she does find and pick up the toy, give tons of happy praise and maybe a treat. If you happen to find the toy first, exclaim “Yay! I got the toy!!” and dance around the room with it. Sound silly? That’s the point.... If you’re having fun, so will your dog.
* Hold my bone – This one is a more sedate game, but some dogs really enjoy it. Simply hold one end of a Nylabone or other chew toy and allow your dog to gnaw on the other end. Despite being less active than other games, this is still an interactive activity. You may even find your dog asking to play it by pushing his bone into your hands or lap. Indulge him every now and then, and your relationship will be the better for it.
* Be creative! Try whatever comes to mind. If you come up with a game, but aren’t quite sure if it's okay, just check with an instructor. We can point out any potential pitfalls, give you ideas of how to play more safely, and maybe even help you come up with ways to take your games to the next level.

**A Few Reminders**

-Always park your dog before and after playing. If your dog should have a relieving accident in the playroom, please alert an instructor for cleanup.

-Do your best to pick up toys and leave the room clear for the next person. If you are unable to find all the toys, ask an instructor for help.

-Be considerate and keep playtimes to 15-20min. Others are likely to want to use the playroom as well. Communicate with your classmates so everyone has a chance to play.

-Only one dog and handler should be in the playroom at a time. Do not allow dogs to play together unless approved by an instructor.

NOTE: If you are training with a new dog at home, your instructor may be able to help you identify potential play areas, and work with you to ensure that both you and your dog can enjoy the benefits of regular play time.

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