

In-House Behavior Modification Protocol Controlled Tug Game

This protocol to be used for dogs who become hyper and aroused in play and cannot settle.

Teach “drop it”

Before you start the tug game you must teach the dog a “drop it” cue. To do this, give the dog a tug rope to take into his/her mouth. When the dog has it, but before you start to tug, show him/her a high value treat and AS he/she spits out the tug rope to get the treat say “drop it” in a cheerful voice and then praise and give a treat (this is pairing the cue with the action). Then give the tug rope back to the dog and repeat the process several times in a row. When you think that you have associated the words “drop it” with the behavior of the dog spitting the tug rope out (about a dozen times) you can test your cue by saying “drop it” without showing the treat up front and if he/she does he/she has learned the cue. From then on, you should not have to show the dog the treat to get the drop it behavior. Practice this exercise so that the dog drops the tug rope any time you cue “drop it”.

Using cue during tug game

Once the dog knows “drop it” you can start incorporating the cue into your tug game. Offer the tug rope and encourage the dog to start to tug but before he/she gets too aroused – say “drop it”. If the dog drops the rope – praise and give a treat and then give the tug rope back and start tugging again. Do this over and over until the dog learns to drop the rope during the game any time that you ask for that behavior. Through the sessions allow the dog to tug with more and more vigor before asking him/her to drop it. If at any time the dog doesn’t drop the tug rope, you should release your hold of the rope and say: “too bad” and walk away.

Add the cue “sit” after “drop it”

Once all is going well with the “drop it” cue during your game, start to add the behavior of “sit”. Tug with the dog for a while and then cue “drop it” – when he/she does praise and then cue “sit”. When the dog sits, praise and resume the tug game. The reward for dropping the rope and then sitting is to get the opportunity to tug again. As the training progresses, have the dog sit for varied amounts of time before the game resumes.