Welcome to I Love My Crate Playbook

Would you love your dog to be cool, calm and collected one moment... and ready to rock the next?
A confident, motivated, focused companion who knows when to switch “on” and when to chill?

"I Love My Crate" is a self-paced course designed to help your dog fall in love with their crate or Hot Zone—while mastering the art of self-regulation and confidence.

Step by step, in fun and strategic layers, your dog will learn how to settle, when to get energised, and how to stay focused—all while deepening the bond you share. Think of it as building a toolbox for life... together!

This free e-book will guide you through three core games of my Online Course. Play all games full out by following the step by step guides and get an insight of my training philosophy.

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Happy playing
Anke & Clover

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Treat Diving

This game is not only simple but also incredibly versatile. It serves as a valuable tool to increase your dog's love for rewards while allowing you to observe what truly excites your dog.
As you engage in this game, you'll see how your dog grows their value for playing by an increased arousal state.

We will introduce the "search" cue, providing your dog with clear guidance on when it's appropriate to look for food/treats on the ground. They will learn that it is OK when you give permission. Harnessing the "Power of Permission" is a fundamental element of dog training.

Moreover, this game offers an invaluable opportunity for you to refine your dog training mechanics through strategic reward placement and can effectively transition your dog's focus from the food to you and create value for the dog bed or mat.

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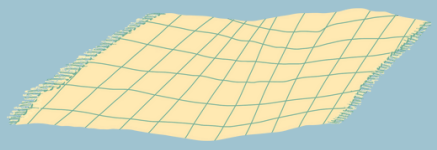
What you'll need:

Prepare your training area without your dog

- Your hungry dog

- Treats (bite size) in a bowl – choose different treats from low to high value

- A non-slippery floor
- A mat that can be folded (towels work great)



- A distraction-free room
- Your mobile phone on a tripod to video your session

- A timer to keep sessions short

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Step-by-step guide:

Growing confidence to chase the treat

In this initial stage of the game, we are observing our dog's confidence and their value for different types of treats.

- Grab 3 – 5 treats making sure you have a good mix of low to high value treats in your hand
- Stand still and toss a treat on the floor, encouraging your dog to chase it.
- Take note of the treats that your dog is going for quicker – make a mental note of which ones they favour.
- Repeat step 2 until you see your dog being excited to chase the treat.
- Give your dog a break and repeat this step as much as you need until your dog is confident playing.
- Once your dog is excited and is “treat diving”, move on to the next stage.

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Introducing a cue

I use the word “search” to let my dog know that they have permission to look for food on the floor. You can choose any cue you feel comfortable with, making sure it is clear and you are not inclined to use the word in your everyday language. Stay consistent.

- Repeat the steps as outlined in Stage 1, however, say your “search” cue before you throw the treat.
- Remember to remain standing still when you throw the treat.
- The order is as follows:
  - Grab some treats from your bowl
  - Remain still
  - Say your “search” cue
  - Toss the treat for your dog to chase

- Use different values of treats to see which ones get your dog excited.
- It is time to progress to the next stage when your dog is excited upon hearing the “search” cue, looks at the floor and happily chases after the treats.
- Go at your dog’s pace.
- You would now have an idea of which treats your dog values most. Write the rank of order down.

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Introducing the dog mat/bed

Start by using only one mat or bed to introduce this stage of the game.

- Place the mat/bed on the floor
- Say your “search” cue and toss a higher value treat on the mat/bed
- If your dog comes off the mat/bed by themselves then repeat the above steps several times.
- If they remain on the bed, say your “search” cue and toss a lower value treat on the floor for them to come off
- You will notice that your dog will gravitate towards the mat/bed after a few repetitions; we have created value for being on the mat/bed.
- Troubleshooting: My dog won’t leave their mat/bed.
  - You have created a lot of value for the mat/bed, so your dog will know that reinforcement is coming when they are on there. Reverse the value of treats for a few repetitions. Use the higher value treat to get them off the mat/bed and the medium value treat for when they are on.
- Once your dog has value for one mat/bed, play the game in different rooms in your house and with different mats/beds. But only make one change (i.e., room OR mat/bed) at a time until they are confident with one or the other.

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Daily Use:

The Treat Diving Game is a great game to play daily. It will strengthen your dog's understanding that not everything lying on the floor is theirs, but they can have your permission for finding food on the floor when they hear your "search" cue. Furthermore, it is very valuable to introduce the permission to leave a station.

Is your dog sometimes uneasy in certain environments or situations? Play a game of Treat Diving to take off their mind and focus on the hunting fun.

Checklist:

1. Have you videoed and reviewed your session?
2. Have you kept sessions short and fun?
3. Are you standing still when you say your "search" cue and before you toss the treat?
4. Is your dog confident and happy to chase the treat?
5. Look at your dog's T.E.M.P (Tails, Ears/Eyes, Mouth, Posture)
6. Have you written down the value of treats?

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Hot Zone

Mastering the Hot Zone Game has many benefits in your life together. It creates clear expectations for them, no matter where you are or what you might come across. This game will not only grow your dog's confidence but will also give you the confidence that they have great control and can relax while you go about your business. This skill can also be used to get your dog to love their crate.

We all would love a dog that can just relax anywhere we take them.

- Going to the cafe to catch up with friends? Not a problem.
- Going to the park to have a picnic with the family? Not a problem.
- Having people over for dinner? Not a problem.
- You need to open your front door to receive a delivery? Not a problem.

With this game you're also teaching your dog to stay on their bed until released. In my training, I am not making use of the cues "stay" or "wait" – when asked for any position, my dog knows to remain in that position until released.

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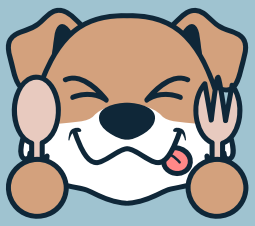
What you'll need:

Prepare your training area without your dog being present.

- A non-slippery floor
- A target such as yoga mat, folded blanket, or bed sheet.
- A hungry dog 
- Your dog's favourite treats (bite size)
- Your mobile phone on a tripod to video your session
- A timer – make sure to keep sessions short

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Step-by-step-guide:

Getting in/on the Hot Zone

In this first step of the game, we will teach our dog that by "finding" the Hot Zone, good things happen.

- Grab 5 - 8 treats.
- Place your chosen target on the floor.
- When your dog "finds" the Hot Zone (either investigates with their nose or steps on it with one paw), reward them by saying your "search" cue and toss a treat just slightly away from the target, so your dog must come off.
- This will set them up for finding the HZ again.
- Repeat the above steps a few times until your dog has great understanding.
- Increase criteria by waiting for them to have 2 paws on the target, then raise again for 4 paws on the target.

Reward in position

In this stage, we want to reward for a bit of duration on the HZ. When your dog is showing understanding for the game, make your HZ smaller for this stage. Just fold up your target. Play a few practice rounds with the smaller target like you did in the step above.

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When you are ready to progress, do the following:

- When your dog is on the HZ, say “cook” (or whichever cue you would like to use to let your dog know reinforcement is coming to you) and give your dog a treat while they are on the HZ.
- Release them off the HZ by saying “search” and tossing a treat away from the target. Keep your mechanics clean.
- You can play around a bit with the duration before you say “cook” and reward and release them again. Make sure you are not always asking for longer but mix it up with easy shorter repetitions.
- Watch your dog’s T.E.M.P – are they still engaged and have fun playing?
- Work up your “search” cue to your dog, leaving the HZ when you say the cue without throwing a treat. However, throw the treat once they come off.
- Increase the difficulty of the game by making the HZ even smaller.

The choice is with your dog

If you dog is taking some time to go back to the Hot Zone, resist the temptation to help them by cuing them onto the target. Give them the chance to figure out what you want and reward as soon as they are moving onto the Hot Zone again.

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Combine the target with the dog bed

In this step we are putting the HZ target in a dog bed. This might be a challenge for some dogs, you will want to go back to basics when you change the picture.

Once your dog is confident in finding their “new” Hot Zone, slowly increase the distance between you and the HZ. Work in small increments and reward your dog on the HZ.

If your dog is coming off their HZ when you move further away, give them a moment to think. Reward them on HZ when they make the choice to go back; if they are confused, throw a “search” cookie, and stand closer to HZ to make it easier for them.

Play a few repetitions by moving further away but also being close so your dog can earn reinforcement easily. Reward them on the HZ.

Release your dog by saying “search” and tossing a cookie away from the HZ to set them up for the next repetition.

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Increase criteria

Once your dog has mastered the step above, you can take the target away from the bed and this will be your dog's new HZ. Stand close to their bed to start with, rewarding them on HZ when they find it. Increase distance slowly.

Play in different environments

When your dog is happily hopping into their HZ, take the game to a different room in your house. You might need to start at the beginning again when you introduce a new environment.
Play in different rooms and with different Hot Zones.

Once your dog is comfortable in your house, finding different Hot Zones in different rooms, you can take this game into your backyard. If you don't have a dog bed in your backyard, use your HZ target again.

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Put a cue on it

When your dog is confident finding their HZ (bed) after you have released them with “search”, you can put a cue on it. (I say “Hop it Up” – it’s very versatile and not restricted to a bed).

- Play a few rounds of the HZ game
- When your dog is happy hopping back into HZ after “search”, delay them from getting onto HZ by feeding them a few cookies.
- Go down on the floor and close to HZ. When your dog is off the HZ, feed them a few treats. Delay the next treat and say your cue. The cue won’t mean anything to your dog but they have reinforcement history from going back to HZ so they will.
- Only say your cue once and wait them out, reward and praise when they hop onto HZ.
- Repeat this a few times, 5 – 6 repetitions.

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Daily Use:

Playing this game daily, you will find that your dog will seek out their Hot Zone by themselves. Try to implement the game in your daily life. Preparing their food in the morning – maybe they can wait in their Hot Zone. Think about where you can use this skill and work towards this goal.
A portable, foldable mat is a must have if you'd like to take this game on the road. Our dogs thrive when they know what is expected and a target will give them enough information to offer great choices.
Remember to keep the game simple when you change environment. Watch your dog's choices and adjust your criteria accordingly. No one can be successful with a university-level task if they are still in primary school.
Keep sessions short and fun!

Checklist:

1. Have you videoed and reviewed your session?
2. Have you kept sessions short and fun?
3. Are you standing still when you say your "search" cue and before you toss the treat?
4. Is your dog happily hopping into their Hot Zone?
5. Look at your dog's T.E.M.P (Tails, Ears/Eyes, Mouth, Posture)
6. Have you played this game in different environments?

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I hope you and your dog enjoyed these games. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out via email: hello@ankesdogtraining.com or via my website.

Scan the QR code below to find out more about the comprehensive online course.

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