RETRIEVING GAMES

Game Day 5 - Hot Zone (HZ)

Mastering the Hot Zone Game has many benefits in your life together with your dog. It creates clear expectations for them, no matter where you are or what 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.

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 mobile phone on a tripod to video your session
- A timer – make sure to keep sessions short
- Your dog's favourite treats.

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Step-by-step-guide:

1. 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.

a. Grab 5 - 8 treats.
b. Place your chosen target on the floor.
c. When your dog "found" the Hot Zone, reward him by saying your "search" cue and toss a treat just slightly away from the target, so your dog must come off.
d. This will set them up for finding the HZ again.
e. Repeat the above steps a few times until your dog has great understanding.

2. 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 stage 1.

When you are ready to progress, do the following:

a. When your dog is on the HZ, say "cook" (or whichever cue you have chosen in your Collar Grab Game as LSM) and give your dog a treat while they are on the HZ.
b. Release them off the HZ by saying "search" and tossing a treat away from the target.
c. You can play around a bit with the duration before you say "cook" and reward and release them again. Making sure you are not always asking for longer but also mix it up with easy short durations.
d. Watch your dog's T.E.M.P – are they still engaged and have fun playing?
e. 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 came off.
f. Increase the difficulty of the game by making the HZ even smaller.

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3. 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 going onto the Hot Zone again.

4. 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 would 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 made 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.

5. Increase criteria

Once your dog has mastered Step 4, 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.

6. 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 habitat.
Play in different rooms and with different Hot Zones.

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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.

7. 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).

a. Play a few rounds of the HZ game
b. When your dog is happy hopping back into HZ after "search", delay them from getting onto HZ by feeding them a few cookies.
c. 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.
d. Only say your cue once and wait them out, reward and praise when they hop onto HZ.
e. Repeat this a few times, 5 – 6 repetitions.

8. Creating value for the crate

a. Put the mat half in, half out of the crate.
b. When your dog starts to go to the mat, throw your treat towards the crate.
c. Move the mat into the crate and throw the treat in when your dog is in!
d. Refrain from using your "mat cue" for this game, since we want our dogs to make the choice to go into the crate.
e. Once they are comfortable going into the crate, you can then put a cue to going into the crate. I just use "in your crate".
f. Start by saying the cue when they are on their way to the crate. Stand close to the crate when you say your cue.

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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 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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