RETRIEVING GAMES

Game Day 10 – The Pick-Ups

This stage of teaching our dogs a reliable retrieve can be quite challenging and frustrating for dog and guardians alike. Keep calm and patient, go at your dog's pace and try not to rush this stage. It is the make it or break it to a good retrieve.

What you'll need:

- A confined space
- Your dog
- The toy your dog has played with in Game Day 9
- Other safe toys or items you would like your dog to pick up
- High value treats
- A clicker or marker word
- Your dog should be familiar with all Foundation Games

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Step-by-step guide:

a. Start this session with a few repetitions of Game 2
b. Once done, increase your criteria and withhold the click for the touch. Be sure that you position yourself so you can see your dog's mouth and the toy clearly. See what your dog offers you when you withhold the click.
c. Click if your dog picks up the toy. Your dog should drop the toy, and you can reward with a cookie throw.
d. Make sure you are clicking the lifting of the toy – the time your dog picks up the toy and starts lifting their head. Waiting too long until the dog has lifted their head will lead to a premature drop (before you click).
e. End the session as before.

Troubleshooting:
My dog doesn't pick up the toy when I delay the click. Your dog might get a bit frustrated at this stage, since the pervious behaviour (touching the toy) didn't earn a reward. See what your dog offers, they might touch the toy a little bit harder – click and reward this. Another behaviour some dogs offer is a slightly open mouth towards the toy – this is worth a click! Repeat these steps a few times and ask a question by delaying the click – is there a mouth around the toy next time?

My dog doesn't drop the toy when I click. If your dog doesn't drop the toy upon hearing a click, use your verbal "search" cue and throw the cookie. They will eventually drop the toy upon hearing the click if you keep practicing.

Daily use: Play this game once per day for the next week or so. Increasing the length of each session until you have repeated pick-ups for about 2 – 3 minutes. Throw the cookie reset into different directions, so your dog learns to approach the toy from different angles.

Once the pick-ups are getting very fluent with this toy, start using different toys or items. You may need to start with Game 1 when introducing a new one – but the progress should be much quicker.

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You can use any item that is safe for your dog to pick up and introduce toys that have a higher value or are a bit more interesting for your dog. This will help them to generalise the behaviour and be comfortable with picking up many different things.

Start varying your position as well, e.g. standing up. Only change one thing at a time: Either change:

- Environment OR
- Item/toy OR
- Position

Only when your dog is proficient with one change, add another, e.g., your dog reliably picks up a new item in your kitchen, move to your bedroom OR stand up while placing the toy down.
Take your time with this step and only progress to Game Day 11 when your dog has played with different toys/items and in different environments.

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