RETRIEVING GAMES

Game Day 7 – Mine!

Our dogs live in a world where any valuable resource is their property as early as noticing the resource. Once a dog has taken possession of a valuable resource, it is considered their property. Living in our world, this behaviour can become problematic, if we don't take the time to teach them that giving up a resource can lead to reinforcement. This skill also teaches our dogs that we are no threat to them and won't just take anything out of their mouth without requesting.

As usual, start your training session with an engaging game.

What you'll need:

- Your dog
- Your dog's favourite treats
- A toy your dog likes (reinforcement level 4)
- A toy your dog goes crazy for (reinforcement level 8 – 10)
- A food item your dog loves such as a hot dog
- Items with a distraction level of 1 - 3
- Your mobile phone on a tripod to video your session
- Different rooms
- Some items you can use e.g. chair, dustpan & brush, umbrella, shopping bag
- Some different clothes for you to wear e.g. gum boots, coat, hat
- You and your dog should be familiar with the IYC game

You would also need a verbal cue to ask your dog to give up an item. Favourite ones are:

- Mine!
- Thank you
- Give
- Drop

I will use "mine!" in the instructions below.

Start to play this game in an environment with no distractions.

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Step-by-step-guide:

1. Start to condition the cue

In this first step of the game, we will start to condition the cue you will use to ask your dog to give up something they have in their mouth.

a. Have a few treats in your hand and casually walk around with your dog
b. Say your "mine!" cue and immediately place a pile of treats on the floor
c. While your dog is eating, point out some bits and pieces for them – this little step will tell your dog that your hands are no threat of taking anything away
d. Repeat the above by changing your position:
    i. Sit on the ground
    ii. Stand up
    iii. Walk around
    iv. Sit in a chair
    v. Walk in a circle
    vi. With your dog walking on your left
    vii. With your dog walking on your right
e. For the next few repetitions, say your cue when your dog is looking away from you – capture the moment your dog disengages from you.
f. Change your treat delivery to throwing it on the floor.

2. Touch your dog

Once you have played the above multiple times with you being in different situations, your dog being focused on you and being disengaged from you, it is time to start touching your dog. Another step for helping them to be comfortable with a resource and you being close to them.

a. Play the above game and while your dog is eating, gently touch them
    i. Start to touch them on their body
    ii. Avoid touching their head/face/mouth in the beginning stages

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3. Generalise the cue

Play the game in many different environments, e.g. your kitchen, your hallway, your bedroom, your living area etc. Put on different clothes while playing e.g., put on a hat/beanie, put on a coat, wear shorts, different types of shoes, open an umbrella (only do this if your dog is OK with it). Change your position while wearing different outfits too.
Put out different items while you play. Play both versions where you touch your dog and where you won't touch your dog. Remember to still point out bits and pieces for them on the floor.
Change up your treat delivery – sometimes place it, sometimes throw it.

4. Bring objects in

You would have noticed in previous steps, that your dog starts to orient to the floor upon hearing the cue. This is what we want to condition more in this step.

a. Say your cue and wait for your dog to look at the floor
b. Put your pile of treats on the floor as before
c. Place one of your low value distractions (items) on the floor
    i. Say your cue when your dog is looking at the object
    ii. Throw treats on the floor
    iii. Repeat above
d. Move on by placing a low value toy on the floor
    i. Repeat as above, mix up treat delivery
    ii. Make sure you throw or place the treats on the floor after you said the cue – regardless of your dog's behaviour
    iii. Increase the difficulty by using higher value toys

5. Continue to raise criteria

Play the above step for some time, make sure your dog can disengage with the toy upon hearing the cue or you are throwing the treats.
Raise your criteria for earning the cookies:

a. Place a medium value toy on the floor and let your dog get it
b. Say your "mine!" cue and throw cookies on the floor, regardless of your dog's behaviour – depending on the value of the toy, they will let go after hearing the cue and seek out the cookies.

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c. In this next repetition, let your dog have the toy for a bit
    i. Say your cue and drop treats on the floor
    ii. While your dog is eating, remove the toy from the floor
    iii. Play around with this step by sometimes taking the toy off the floor while your dog is eating, sometimes leave it there

6. Use toy play as reinforcement

Engage with your dog in a game of tug or toy play. Say your cue and as soon as your dog is releasing the cue, let them get it again – use your "get it" cue.

Increase your criteria by using higher value toys.

7. Fun happens when you let go

Continue to play with your dog and alternate between reinforcing with cookie throw or continuing the game.

Have two different toys on you. Engage your dog in a game of tug, say your cue and after your dog lets go of the toy, reinforce with the other toy. E.g. play a game of tug and as a reinforcer, throw another toy away to chase (use your "get it" cue). Continue to use toys as reinforcement. When you put enough value into this game, playing is a great reinforcer to let go of items.

Play this game with a Hot Dog or any other bigger food reward your dog could take.

a. Place the Hot Dog on the floor and ask your dog to "get it"
b. Upon taking the Hot Dog, say your "Mine!" cue and immediately throw a handful off cookies close to your dog on the floor.
c. Take the Hot Dog while your dog is searching for the treats
d. Use different food items to practice
e. Change up your treat delivery: throwing, placing on the floor, deliver to mouth

8. Go Outside

Find a quiet spot and play the games outside. You might need to start at the beginning to warm up and remind your dog of the game. Increase your criteria gradually like you did inside.

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Troubleshooting:

My dog gets too excited about the toy and won't let go.

- Make your treats come alive, run around with them and throw them into the opposite direction. Entice your dog to chase them – they will naturally let go of the toy. Ignore the toy in their mouth and after they have dropped it.

My dog is chewing the toy or took it without permission.

- Say your cue and use a cookie throw
- Play a few rounds just with few before going back to a lower value toy
- Increase difficulty gradually

Daily Use: Giving up any item on request is an invaluable, if not lifesaving skill. It builds trust and confidence in your dog that you will never just snatch anything away from them – therefore prevents resource guarding tendencies. Practice this game daily and in many different environments. Adjust the game to the ability of your dog as needed.

Imagine your dog got hold of something dangerous, no need to panic, you can ask them to let go.

Checklist:

1. Have you videoed and reviewed your session?
2. Have you kept sessions fun?
3. Have you mixed up your treat delivery
4. Look at your dog's T.E.M.P (Tails, Ears/Eyes, Mouth, Posture)
5. Have you played this game in different environments?

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