RETRIEVING GAMES

Game Day 9 – Shaping Toy Pickup

Retrieving and object is a behaviour chain, consisting of 6 different behaviours.

Before we get started, let's break down those behaviours that we need from our dog to retrieve an object:

We start by shaping the dog to be interested in engaging with the toy, touching the toy and eventually picking up the toy. The first two steps are broken down into 2 stages.

What you'll need:

- A confined space
- Your dog on a collar
- A non-self-rewarding toy your dog likes to hold in their mouth
- 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:

Stage 1 – I want this thing!

Not all dogs love to take everything into their mouth and carry it. Let's start by identifying a toy your dog loves to take into their mouth to get started. Further to this, think about toys or items you'd like your dog to ultimately retrieve.
Let's build some value for your dog to grab a toy

Here are a few points to consider:

- Your dog should be comfortable with the material of the toy.
- The toy should be a low value toy, so they are less likely to run away with it.
- They should want to give it up easily and not want to chew or have a party for one with it.
- The toy should be non-bouncy.
- The same applies for novel items you'd like your dog to retrieve.

Once you have chosen your toys and items, follow these steps:

a. Have your treats readily available, ideally in a bowl on the floor or in a treat pouch or your pocket.
b. Hold the clicker in one hand.
c. Play a game of tug or else to increase your dog's arousal level (only do this if your dog is not already excited).
d. Sit in a chair or kneel on the floor
e. Place the toy on the ground, your dog will come over to investigate.
f. The second your dog looks at or goes towards the toy, click and reward with a treat.
g. Throw a reset cookie away for your dog to chase (search) – with each rep, throw the cookie into different directions to teach your dog to approach the toy from different angles.
    a. Your dog will turn around and investigate the toy again, repeat as above.
    b. Repeat this game 5 times.
h. End you session the following:
    a. After your last repetition, throw a cookie for your dog

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b. While your dog is chasing the cookie, pick up the toy

Stage 2 - Touch the toy

After playing the above game, your dog will enthusiastically drive towards the toy. They should be eating the treats you throw, turn and make a beeline for the toy. In this game, we increase our criteria and want the dog to at least touch the toy with their mouth – it is important to only click and pay the dog when they touch the toy with their nose or mouth.

a. Start your game as you did in Game 1 with the toy at your feet or near you (depending if you're sitting in a chair or on the ground)
b. This time, delay the click and see what your dog offers you – some dogs only touch the toy with their nose, some will put their mouth around, some will pick it up – either of these behaviours are fine!
c. Click the contact with the toy and throw your reset cookie. From this moment on, the new criteria (the behaviour that pays) is at least a touch.
d. Repeat the game 5 – 6 times – any behaviour up from a touch will earn a click and reward. Again, vary the direction you throw your cookie.
e. End the session as above by throwing a treat and while your dog is chasing the cookie, pick up the toy.

Some dogs touch the toy with different parts of their muzzle. Be aware of "nosing" the toy with the top of their nose – this will not be leading to a pickup later and should not be clicked/paid. Only click and pay for front of muzzle touches.

Adjust this phase to the ability of your dog. If they fail to earn a click and reward a couple of times in a row, reduce your criteria and click for approaching the toy. Then slowly increase criteria again.

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