HUNTING GAMES – THE FOUNDATIONS

🎾 Game 10 - Reinforcement Zone (RZ)

Where is your dog's Reinforcement Zone?

🎾 Why This Game Matters

Every dog has a Reinforcement Zone. It's the place where they believe good things happen. For many dogs, that zone is in front of us – because since puppyhood, we've rewarded sits, eye contact, and attention directly in front of our body.

But when the leash goes on and the door opens? Reinforcement often shifts away from us. The RZ Game intentionally changes that. Let's teach our dogs the most valuable place to be is at our seam.

Shifting your dog's Reinforcement Zone helps teaching other skills more easily e.g. lose leash walking, walking close, tight sit at your side.

🎾 What You'll Need

- Your dog
- High-value treats
- Leash
- Phone on tripod

🎾 Step-by-Step-Guide

1. Set Up

Start without a leash in a low distracting and safe environment.

2. Build the Behaviour

- Treats in your left hand
- Ask your dog to sit on your right side.
    - If they don't know how, ask for a sit and step next to them.
- Use your pant seam as your visual guide.

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Now:

- Transfer one treat to your right hand.
- Touch your right hip.
    - For small dogs, touch your hip then your knee.
- Say “cook”.
- Delivery the treat directly to your dog’s mouth

Watch carefully for IYC moments

- Are all four feet on the floor?
- Is your dog stretching forward or up to meet the treat?
- Are they leaving position?

If yes to any of the above – pause. Wait for a better choice before delivering. Reset by saying “search” and tossing a treat away.

Repeat until your dog clearly understands that reinforcement lives at your seam. Then switch sides – balance matters.

3. Add a Layer

- Dog in front of you.
- Begin walking backward in a gentle circle.
- Your dog will naturally follow and choose a side.

When they settle for a seam

- Transfer the treat to the hand closest to them.
- Touch your hip.
- Say “cook”.
- Deliver the treat.

Walk for several steps, rewarding at your seam.

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4. Raise Criteria

With two treats left

- Turn into your dog → are both facing forward.
- Reward them again in position

Watch for IYC moments in motion

- Snatching?
- Cutting in front?
- Leaving position?

Pause if needed and wait for clarity. Reset with "search". Repeat and encourage your dog to work on both sides.

Play both stationery and movement versions in one session.
Repetition builds value. Variety builds understanding.

🎾 Advancing the Game

When you've built strong value: Test your dog.

- Ask them to sit at your side.
- Take one step forward.
- Release.

If you've layered well, your dog will return to your seam automatically.

- Progress this by waiting for a sit when they come into RZ
    - If your dog is offering different behaviours when you wait, reset with a treat dive. Cue the sit & reward.
    - Repeat twice with a cue
    - Test without cue

Put the leash on!

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🎾 Troubleshooting

My dog cuts in front of me when walking or releasing.

Return to Step 1 and build more value for your seam.

🎾 Daily Use

The more value you build next to you, the less you will need to manage your dog later. Take your time. Build layers.

RZ builds

- Position awareness
- Value for your body
- Clarity about where reinforcement happens
- Emotional security at your side

Play

- In a new room
- With an open door
- In your backyard
- In your front yard
- While walking down the path

Layer slowly. Each time you change environment, go back to Step 1.

🎾 Checklist

1. Did you review your session?
2. How were your mechanics?
3. Did you play on both sides?
4. Did you play in different environments?

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