HUNTING GAMES – THE FOUNDATIONS

🎾 Game 18 – Mine!

Release builds trust.

🎾 Why This Game Matters

Giving up an item or toy does not end the game – it makes it better. When layered properly, this prevents keep-away, guarding behaviours, and conflict around objects.

🎾 What You'll Need

- Your dog
- A tug toy
- Chew
- Phone on tripod
- High-value treats

🎾 Step-by-Step-Guide

1. Set Up

Chose a verbal cue:

- Mine!
- Thank you
- Give
- Drop

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

Have your treats in a treat pouch or pocket for easy reach.

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2. Build the Behaviour

Option 1 – Tugging (low – medium value toy)

- Play a short game of tug with your dog
- Stop movement, hold on to the toy
- When you feel your dog loosening their grip, say your cue
- Immediately follow up with a treat to your dog's nose
- When your dog opens their mouth – deliver treat
- Repeat 5 times

Option 2 – Food Chew (low - medium value)

- Offer the chew to your dog, hold on to it
- Keep still
- Say your cue
- Immediately follow up with a treat to your dog's nose
- When your dog opens their mouth – deliver treat
- Take the chew
- Repeat 5 times

3. Add a Layer

Play as above but this time wait for your dog's choice upon hearing the cue

- Feed a treat when they give up toy/chew
- Play a few more session in Stage 2 – test again

🎾 Use Toy Play or having the Chew as Reinforcement

Engage in tug or offer the chew.
Say your cue.
The moment your dog releases, immediately allow them to get it again using your "Get it" cue.
Increase difficulty by using higher value toys/chews.
Releasing now predicts more fun.

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4. Raise Criteria

🎾 Fun Happens When You Let Go

Alternate reinforcement:

- Sometimes cookie throw
- Sometimes cookie to mouth
- Sometimes continue the game
- Sometimes allow to finish the chew

Carry two toys.

Play tug. Cue “Mine!”. After release, reinforce with the second toy – for example, throw it and cue “Get it”.

Playing becomes the reward for letting go.

You can also practice with larger food items.

Example:

a. Place a Hot Dog on the floor and cue “Get it”.
b. As soon as your dog takes it, say “Mine!” and throw a handful of cookies nearby.
c. Remove the Hot Dog while your dog is searching for treats.

Practice with different food items.

🎾 Go Outside

Find a quiet outdoor space. Start at the beginning to warm up. Increase criteria gradually – just as you did indoors.

Layer slowly and keep it fun!

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🎾 Troubleshooting

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

- Make your treats dynamic
- Run with them.
- Throw the cookies in the opposite direction.

Entice your dog to chase. Ignore the toy. After they drop it, continue the game calmly.

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

- Say your cue and use a cookie throw.
- Play a few easy repetitions before increasing criteria.
- Return to a lower-value toy if needed.
- Increase difficulty gradually.

🎾 Daily Use

Giving up items on request is an invaluable – even lifesaving – skill.

It builds:

- Trust
- Confidence
- Emotional safety around resources

When your dog understand that you will never snatch something away, guarding tendencies decrease dramatically.

Practice daily.
Practice in different environments.
Adjust criteria to your dog's ability.

If your dog ever picks up something dangerous, there is no need to panic – you simply ask and they let go.

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Checklist

1. Did you review your session?
2. Did you keep sessions short?
3. Did you mix up treat delivery?
4. Did you progress at your dog's speed?

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