HUNTING GAMES – THE FOUNDATIONS

🎾 Game 3 - Hot Zone (HZ)

There is a place where calm, clarity and reinforcement live.

🎾 Why This Game Matters

This skill has enormous real-life value.

A dog who understands Hot Zone can:

- Relax at a café
- Stay settled during dinner with guests
- Wait calmly while you answer the door
- Rest confidently in new environments
- Wait until it's action again
- Build love for their crate
- Builds understanding of a "stay"

🎾 What You'll Need

- Your dog
- A clear target (yoga mat, folded blanket, towel, etc.)
- Treats (medium – high value)
- Dog bed
- Phone on a tripod

🎾 Step-by-Step-Guide

1. Set Up

Prepare your quiet area without your dog. Play on non-slip flooring.

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2. Build the Behaviour

a. Place your target on the floor.
b. Have 5 – 8 treats ready.
c. When your dog approaches the target, say “search” and toss a treat slightly away from it. This gives them the opportunity to “find” it again.
d. Wait with your treat toss until your dog has at least one paw on the target
e. Progress until they step onto the target.

Repeat with your new criteria (all 4 feet on the target) for 5 more reps.

We are building reinforcement history.

3. Add a Layer

Fold the target mat.

When ready:

a. When your dog is on the HZ, say “cook”.
b. Deliver the treat while they remain on HZ.
c. Release with “search” and toss a treat away.

You can now begin varying duration:

- Sometimes short
- Sometimes slightly longer

Mix easy repetitions with harder ones.

Gradually build to releasing with “search” without needing to toss first – throw after the leave.

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4. Raise Criteria

If your dog hesitates to return to the Hot Zone:

- Resist the urge to help
- Give them space to figure it out.
- When they step onto the target – mark and reward generously

Choice builds confidence.

➡️ Next

Place the Hot Zone target inside a dog bed.
When changing environments or visuals, lower criteria slightly. Start with Stage 1, close to the new HZ.

Once your dog confidently finds the new Hot Zone:

- Slowly increase distance between you and the bed.
- Reward on the Hot Zone.

If your dog leaves or can't "find" the Hot Zone when you move further away – pause.
Give them a moment to return on their own.
If confusion appears, throw a reset cookie ("search") and move closer again.

➡️ Next

- Remove the target and use only the bed.
- Start close again.
- Gradually increase distance.
- Change the environment

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➡️ Next:

Only add a verbal cue once your dog is confidently returning to Hot Zone after release.

The sequence:

a. Delay access slightly by feeding a few cookies away from Hot Zone.
b. Say your cue once.
c. Wait.
d. Reward when they “find” HZ.

Start close to HZ. Keep repetitions clean and limited.

🎾 Advancing the Game

Hot Zone transitions beautifully into crate training.

- Place the mat partially in the crate.
- Reinforce approaching the crate.
- Wait for stepping inside.
- Gradually move the mat fully into the crate.

Allow your dog to choose the crate. Once confident, add your crate cue.

🎾 Daily Use

Hot Zone should become part of everyday life.

- While preparing meals
- While opening the front door
- When guests arrive
- During quiet moments

Dogs thrive when expectations are clear. A portable mat makes this skill transferable anywhere.
Keep it simple when you change environments or criteria.
Observe. Adjust. Layer slowly.

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Checklist

1. Did you review your session?
2. Were sessions short and happy?
3. Did you stand still before releasing with “search”?
4. Is your dog happily seeking the Hot Zone?
5. How does their T.E.M.P look?
6. Have you played in multiple environments?

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