HUNTING GAMES – THE FOUNDATIONS

🎾 Game 7 - Hand Targets (HT)

Connect when it matters most.

🎾 Why This Game Matters

A solid hand target builds:

- Focus
- Precision
- Connection
- Emotional regulation
- Directional control
- Loose leash foundations

You can add a verbal cue like “touch” or “bump” but remember – presenting your hand is already a cue. I recommend playing both with and without a verbal cue, so your dog learns to respond to the visual first.

🎾 What You’ll Need

- Your dog (on leash)
- High-value treats
- Phone on a tripod

🎾 Step-by-Step-Guide

1. Set Up

Before bringing your dog in, practice the treat delivery.

Mechanics matter here.

a. Hold treats in your left hand – this is your “cookie hand”.
b. Present your right hand, palm facing your imaginary dog.

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c. Keep your cookie hand above where your dog's head would be (IYC position).
d. When your "dog" touches your target hand, cup that hand and let a treat drop from above into your palm.

If the treat falls to the floor, say "search" and allow access.
Switch hands and repeat.

Clear mechanics = clear communication.

2. Build the Behaviour

Play on both sides.

a. Hold treats in your cookie hand.
b. Present your target hand, palm slightly cupped.
c. Keep your cookie hand above your dog's head (IYC).

At first, your dog might simply investigate. Reward investigation.

After 2 – 3 repetitions, present your hand more firmly and wait.
We are now looking for nose contact.

When your dog touches your hand:

- Cup your hand
- Let the treat drop from above
- Delivery cleanly
-

Keep your hand still. Resist moving it toward your dog's face.

🎾 Add a Verbal Cue (New Cue/Old Cue)

Once your dog reliably touches your hand (both sides) when presented:

d. Say your new cue ("bump").
e. Wait 2 seconds

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f. Present your hand (old cue).

🎾 Add Movement

Once your mechanics feel natural.

g. Offer your right hand – reward 4 – 5 touches.
h. Run together to a new room.
i. Offer you left hand – reward 4 – 5 touches.

Movement raises arousal slightly. Be selective. Only reward touches that meet your criteria. Play with and without the verbal cue.

3. Raise Criteria

Ask for:

- Firmer touches
- Multiple touches
- Strong, confident nose contact

Build gradually toward 25 – 30 quality hand targets in one session. Your hand must stay firm and predictable. Consistency builds confidence.

Once your hand targets are strong

- Add mild distractions (start low on your distraction list).
- Integrate IYC (hold open treats in the opposite hand).
- Close your eyes and feel the strength of the touch.

If your dog struggles: Move further from the distraction.

We adjust the environment before lowering clarity.

🎾 Advancing the Game

Firm hand touches with and without cue = put some restrain on it Game Day 8!

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Daily Use

You can use them to:

- Guide your dog into position
- Teach walking at your side
- Redirect focus
- Assess arousal
- Transition between exercises

If your dog cannot perform a simple hand target, they may be over- or under aroused. It's a beautiful emotional barometer.

And remember: Do not use the verbal cue to "get attention" when your dog is distracted. Present the hand – if they cannot respond, create distance and try again.

Checklist

1. Did you review your session?
2. Were sessions short and engaging?
3. Were your treat delivery mechanics clean?
4. How does your dog's T.E.M.P look?
5. Have you played in different environments?

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