



Support for adopters

INFORMATION FOR NEW DOG OWNERS

Teaching your dog to give up a toy

When taking on any dog whether young or old it is important that the individual dog will happily give up anything that it has in its possession.

Some dogs see their toys of being very high value to them and therefore may show some form of aggression if you try to take the toy away. Other dogs simply run around with it in their mouths not giving it up and seeing it all as a good game. Then you have the dogs that will give the toy up but only after a tug of war or prizing it out of the dog's mouth.

Dogs learn by the immediate consequence of their behaviour, this means that if the outcome of the behaviour they have shown has the desired response they want, they will become more skilled at this behaviour and then the behaviour becomes more reinforced.

So where do we start in training our dogs to give up their toys?

- Remember don't think because you may have rehomed an old dog you can't change the behaviour. All behaviours can be altered with time and patience.
- If you have rehomed a puppy, don't think "we will wait till the puppy is older as it is nice to be getting into tug of war games". You may just be reinforcing the behaviour that you don't want later on in life.
- For training it is best to go into a secure location which is not too large, where your dog is not able to roam too far away from you. You also don't want any distractions.

Training a dog that is food focused to give up toys

- Using high value treats, something that your dog finds really tasty, should encourage the dog to give up the toy.
- As your dog has the toy in his mouth give your dog a command such as "drop" and then drop or toss a high value treat on the floor near to him.
- As he drops the toy to eat the treat praise him, such as "good boy", but do not at this point try to pick the toy up. Remember you need your dog to not be in competition with you for the toy.
- Again call your dog and when you have his attention give the "drop" command and drop a treat on the floor for him.
- Remember you will need to be patient some dogs learn quicker than others.

You will need to keep repeating this until your dog is dropping the toy when you tell him.

- Now your dog is dropping the toy with your “drop” command and you are dropping the treat on the floor, it is time for your dog to start dropping the toy when the “drop” command is given but to now taking the treat from your hand. Still do not try and pick the toy up.

Once your dog is taking the treat from your hand it is time to start picking the toy up after your dog has dropped it.

- You now have your dog dropping the toy with the “drop” command and taking the treat from your hand.
- Now, when you give your dog the “drop” command as you give the treat with one hand pick up the toy with the other giving your dog lots of verbal praise and then toss the toy back for him to pick up.

Remember you will need to be doing this training on a regular basis so that the behaviour you desire can be reinforced into your dog.

Training a dog that is not food focused

- Some dogs are so focused on their toys that food will not entice them to give up the toy.
- Have two/three toys at the ready for your training session.
- Toss a toy for your dog.
- As your dog has the toy in his mouth ask him to “drop” and then show him the other toy and toss the toy on the floor.
- As your dog drops the toy to pick up the new one praise him such as “good boy”
- Ask him again to “drop” and again toss the next toy in your hand onto the floor
- Again praise and then keep repeat the sequence

You now have your dog dropping a toy to allow him to pick the other toy up with you praising him when he drops the first toy.

You now need to teach him to drop his toy and wait for you to toss the next toy:

- Now when you give the “drop” command let your dog see the toy in your hand, wiggle it a bit if needed to gain his attention, as soon as your dog has dropped the toy praise him with “good boy” and toss the toy immediately
- You will need to keep repeating this to reinforce the behaviour you want.

If you are experiencing difficulties with teaching your dog how to give up its toys seek professional help from a qualified dog trainer/behaviourist – see www.rspca.org.uk/findabehaviourist for how to find a qualified behaviourist. Never put yourself or other people’s safety at risk.

All dogs need to be treated as individuals and this is a guideline only.