

Playing with Your Dog

Play is a valuable, important aspect of dog behavior. As with children, dogs should be required to have emotional control over themselves, especially during play. For example, children are expected to raise their hands before shouting out an answer in school. This is about controlling their enthusiasm and emotions. Play can also escalate into aggression if the dog has not learned to control himself during play. The definition of aggression is "an intent to do harm." The key factor to remember with aggression and play is that harm can occur without intent.

Some general rules to stand by:

1. Dogs should not place their mouths on humans during play Dogs must relinquish objects when asked or play ends
2. There shall be no accidental misses during play (i.e. dog grabs clothing instead of tug toy)
3. Humans end the play session, not the dogs
4. Dogs may start play sessions, only when asking in a polite manner, but take "no" for an answer - we don't always want to play
5. Dogs should not knock owners over or grab at clothing
6. Dogs should obey all commands during play and stop when asked

Playing Tug of War

Puppies can get so excited during play that they cannot control themselves. At a young age most puppies desire social contact. This game will teach the pup that if he loses control, he will lose social contact with you. Puppies can learn to play appropriately.

1. Tether the puppy to play this game.
2. Give a cue to start the game "tug!" and allow the puppy to grab and tug on his favorite toy.
3. Once the puppy is aroused, stop tugging on the toy and stand still. Ask the puppy to "sit". He should immediately let go of the tug toy and sit. If he doesn't, simply let go of the toy and move away from the dog. Once he drops the toy pick up the toy and if the puppy is sitting, resume the game.

If you have a mouthy puppy or a puppy that gets over stimulated when he plays tug-of-war, playing the game while he is tethered is important. This will prevent the puppy from doing anything inappropriate until he has learned to control himself while playing.