



**FOLLOW THE
LEADER K9**

BUILDING TOY MOTIVATION

One of the most effective ways to train our dog is through the use of game play. When we have a dog who is highly motivated to have us play with them using a toy, the training process can become so much easier and fun for all of us. Games such as Tug and Fetch can become an essential part of any training system, and also a great alternative or adjunct to regularly walking our dog. For many dogs, this type of reward fulfills their biological purpose to chase and catch things or to use their mouth to bite and hold onto things and as a result will work far better than food as a reward. Often times, in order for our dog to find a very high value in playing with us using toys, we may have to work with them on developing this desire through a strategic and consistent approach. This can take time and effort, but if we put in the time now, we will have many benefits for years to come.

Benefits of High Toy Motivation

Some of the benefits of having a dog with a high motivation for toys and the ability to stay focused on the game in a variety of contexts are as follows:

- We will have a dog who sees us as a great source of fun and excitement and as a result they will love to engage with us with enthusiasm. For example, we can bring a toy with us on the walk and our dog will want to stay near us and look at us in anticipation of play.
- We will have a dog that will be able to engage with us even in the face of a myriad of distractions without needing to pressure our dog or correct them for being distracted. For example, our dog will stay with us vs. constantly run up to people or dogs.
- We will have the ability to create a positive association around things that our dog may have a natural aversion to. For example, our dog who is afraid of new people can find them valuable by having them join in the game play.
- We will have the ability to use toys and play as a reward for obedience and thus create a fun energy around performing commands. For example, we ask the dog to come when called and when they come to us we play with them as a reward.
- We will have a reward that may not cause other dogs to come up to us and interfere with the training. For example, we can have a toy in our pocket and other dogs will not come over to harass us vs. if we have treats they may come over and interfere with our training.



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Tips for Building Toy Motivation

Here are some of the basic techniques that will help us build up a high level of motivation and focus around game play and toys:

- Always begin game play with the phrase "Are you ready?" and end with the phrase "All done."
- When initiating play be sure that we begin in a low distraction area, are truly acting playful ourselves, are willing to be flexible in how we play with our dog as well as what toys we are offering them as a reward.
- Always end game play by calmly sitting with our dog and "cooling down" for long enough that they fully relax and clearly understand that the play is over, before we leave the play area.
- Use a long line when playing with our dog so we can ensure that they do not turn the game into a never ending game of "keep away" or successfully leave the game and find value in a distraction that is present.
- Start with short (5-10 minute/3-5 times per day) sessions in a variety of different places, end the game and leave the area before our dog becomes too bored or exhausted, and limit other options for exercise throughout the rest of the day.

If we stick to these basic techniques we will surely see our dog's focus and motivation improve when it comes to game play and toys as a reward. Eventually we may find that our dog is able to clearly identify a toy and game play to be a high value reward, no matter where we choose to take them. If we work with a qualified trainer to successfully integrate this reward into our training system, the potential benefits are immense. We can eventually have a dog who will do anything we ask of them, simply because they see us as a major source of fun and fulfillment in their life. One final point is that through finding out how our dog likes to play, we can also rule out the possibility that our dog's lack of obedience or even their problematic behavioral issues are not a result of their genetic needs not being fulfilled. As always, your dog is so lucky to have you as their human and remember: "We don't blame them, we train them."