

Playing With Your Dog

I love to have fun. I love to spend time with my dogs. So what's better than combining the two things I love and having fun with my dogs?! There is a science behind play and playing with your dogs. Two excellent resources on the importance of play as well as the science behind it are: *Play Together, Stay Together: Happy & Healthy Play Between People & Their Dogs* by Karen B. London, PhD, & Patricia McConnell, PhD, and *Play With Your Dog* by Pat Miller, CPDT, CDBC. Both of these resources can be found online at Dogwise.com.

Play is an excellent way to improve and build your relationship with your dog in a positive way. Play is important to your puppy's social development as well. Play can be many types of things/activities depending on your dog. Play can be teaching your dog cute tricks, such as: shake, bow, play dead, roll over, etc. This not only impresses the children in your neighborhood, but is fun for you and your dog. Play can be an 'organized' activity such as agility, flyball, treibball, etc. Play can teach your dog to always come when you call and that it is much more fun for them to chase you than be chased! Play is a fun way to teach your dog basic obedience cues. Play can be used to modify behavior problems you may be experiencing with your dog, i.e. Instead of your dog jumping up on visitors, play, 'go get it' with your dog by throwing a treat/toy on the floor, so they are busy chasing the treat/toy instead of jumping up on your visitors. Play can be done with food puzzles and toys that not only work your dog's brain and encourage them to think and problem solve, but tires them out physically as well . . ."a good dog is a tired dog"!

One of the keys in playing with your dog is to ensure that play never crosses over into a dog that is too excited and out of control, grabbing at their owners clothing or body parts. It is important along with teaching your dog to play, that they also learn when it is time to stop. 'Go Wild & Freeze' is an excellent game to teach your dog this principle, when you say 'freeze', all play stops and they are expected to sit/down. Freeze helps to teach your dog self-control, which they all need, especially young or active dogs!

In her book "The Other End of the Leash ", Patricia McConnell writes: "Play is good for our spirits, our bodies, and our minds ". Whether you participate in organized play with your dog, or at home for a few minutes a day . . .have FUN playing with your dog!

Lynnete Wright, MSSA, LSW, CPDT-KA
AKC CGC & STAR Puppy Evaluator
TDI Evaluator
Professional Member of APDT