

PUPPY PLAY

**Pups learn life skills through play.
How to play safely with your puppy
and have some fun!**



Play is and should be intensely pleasurable for all dogs. Dogs are naturally playful animals and will play throughout their lives. Different stages of a dog's life evoke different types of play, from chasing leaves in the wind as a youngster to enjoying a back rub on the grass in the sunshine during old age.

Play has the potential to help shape a pup's brain and successful play at this stage can help to make the dog smarter and more adaptable to new situations. Play is also an important component of a pup's physical development, providing aerobic exercise and safe muscle building. Making time to play appropriate learning games with your pup at the early stages is essential.

We have inherited some myths about canine play that prevent us from getting into the play state with a playful mindset. We have been taught to view all dog play as competitive, that our dogs are looking to beat us and for that reason we must always win to maintain our position as pack leader. This is untrue, dog play is rarely competitive, in fact, many dogs will 'handicap' themselves in order to keep a game going. In this video the labradoodle could easily outrun the spaniel but instead he keeps checking behind and then adjusts his speed to allow the spaniel to keep up.

<https://www.facebook.com/Dogplaylothian/videos/746000116206610/>

Dogs will also modify their play to keep us in the game, they could easily outrun us or just bite us, but they choose not to. Other dogs help dogs learn to manage their responses and play safely and we also need to teach pups how to play safely with us.

Healthy, well fed pups will always play, and they don't need instruction on how to do it, but they do need to learn the 'rules' to keep everyone safe.

Note: dogs will play with young children as if they are other pups, NEVER leave children and dogs alone to play together.

1. Remember pups are always learning – even when you don't think you are teaching. Be careful what they learn at this early stage. Puppy class is here to help you with this.
2. Keep play sessions short, two to three minutes is more than enough. The breaks between play sessions are valuable learning times and help your puppy learn to settle. If your puppy struggles to settle themselves, pop them in a crate or safe place with something to lick or chew. Once your pup can settle themselves down quickly, you can begin to put a few play sessions together. It would look like this:
PLAY → BREAK → PLAY → BREAK → PLAY → STOP/REST

3. Teach your puppy start play cues and stop play cues.
4. Not all dog toys are manufactured. Whatever your pup chooses to play with is their choice of toy. Help them make good choices by keeping their environment tidy and/or restricting access to challenging areas such as the kid's bedroom or the laundry.

Don't play with that, play with this instead

So much about training dogs is focused on stopping a dog, once a problem behaviour has already been learned and this includes playing with items that you consider precious, but the dog considers a toy.

This is understandable, as for many years dog training was based around command and control. Dogs had to become obedient to make life easier for people. Nowadays we flip this around, we need to teach dogs what **to do** in order to thrive in our human world. During the course we will be looking at different dog games and how to teach and play them safely, but from the outset you want to avoid getting into a fight with your dog over a toy or during a game:

1. Have plenty of the type of toy your dog likes most, for example if your dog likes to chase and pick up a ball, you need at least 3 preferably more and all the same type. If your dog won't drop the ball, you don't care, you will play with the next one. Most dog's will drop their 'dead' ball in order to play with you and your 'live' ball. Once your dog learns that they no longer need to fear you taking their toy away, they will be much happier about swapping their toy for your toy.
2. If you have a 'crocodile' type puppy, quick and snappy, then use long toys or toys with long handles. If pup gets too near your hands, drop the toy and move away.
3. Remember that dog's are co-operative animals and really want to play with you rather than compete against you, keep the playful mindset at all times. If either of you leave the playful mindset, end the game and put your pup into a safe place with something to chew or lick.