



Tug-of-War

To tug or not to tug, that is the question. At some point, most dog owners have been warned of the dangers of playing tug-of-war with their dog. The theory being that playing tug-of-war will somehow cause increased aggression or result in the dog challenging the owner in an attempt to be “dominant”. The other popular theory is that it is okay to play tug with your dog as long as you are the clear winner every time. I don’t know about you, but playing a game in which I lose every single time, doesn’t sound like a very fun game.

There is no proof to these theories. In fact, two animal behaviorists in New York City conducted a one of a kind study on owners who play tug-of-war with their dogs versus those who do not. The study found absolutely no correlation between playing tug-of-war games and the probability of dominance aggression.

Tug-of-war is a very natural behavior for dogs and great physical and mental stimulation for the dog and owner. Playing a controlled, structured game of tug-of-war is one of the best ways to teach your dog self-control and basic obedience. There is no need for food treats with this kind of training, because the game itself becomes the reward. That being said, it is of utter importance that the owner establish the rules and that both players follow the rules absolutely.

- **Rule #1:** Leave It. The dog must let go of the toy immediately when you say, “Leave it” or “Give”.
- **Rule #2:** Take It. The dog must never take the toy unless requested to do so by saying “Take it” or “Get it”. Having the toy in your hands is not an invitation to jump up and grab it. The owner always initiates the game.

- **Rule #3:** Frequent Obedience Breaks. Practice control by stopping the game frequently and asking for a Sit, Down, or any basic obedience command. As soon as he complies, reward him with a “Take it” and resume the game.

- **Rule #4:** No Accidental Misses. If the dog becomes too exuberant and begins grabbing at everything but the toy, the game is over. If he accidentally touches any part of your body with his teeth, scream “OUCH!” and end the game abruptly.

If the dog breaks a single rule, the owner simply says, “Too bad!”, puts the toy out of reach, and walks away. There is no other punishment necessary. The Tug-of-War dog learns that bending the rules always results in an abrupt ending to this otherwise super fun game.

Oh, and it’s okay to let your dog win sometimes!