

Toys: Teaching Puppy "My Turn"

By Terry Ryan

"MY TURN" is designed to teach your young puppy to give a toy back nicely. These exercises should not be attempted with a dog that has already growled or snapped at a person. If your dog is guarding his toys, please seek personalized help from a pet behavior professional.

#1. DON'T PLAY, GO AWAY.

If your puppy has the toy and is running around playing keep away, don't play. Just ignore the pup. Turn away -- promising yourself that you will begin training #2 and #3 later in the day!

#2. YOUR ON AND OFF BUTTON

Teach your pup that you are quite willing to play by your rules. With this method she will think she is training you pushing your PLAY button, but actually you are training the puppy. Use a long tug toy or a ball on a rope. You can make a suitable training toy by tying a ball into the toe of short length of nylon stocking or old sock. The ball should be small enough to grab, but large enough to avoid choking. The nylon or sock should be long enough so that a 5-6 inch "handle" will dangle outside of the dog's mouth when she holds the ball. When you are ready to get the toy back, simply hold tight to your handle. Say nothing. If she doesn't let go, slowly work your way up the toy's handle until you are holding it right against her mouth. Hold your hands tight against your body. Freeze so that no tug action can take place. Say nothing. Since this is no fun for the pup, she will eventually let go. Wait her out. She may try harder before she gives up. That's good! It's the extinction burst. Be happy. It means you've got the puppy's number. As soon as she begins to release, say MY TURN and take the toy. Hold the toy for a second or two, then begin to play again. The dog learns that dropping the toy when asked makes you come to life and play with her again.

#3. GIVE AND TAKE TRAINING

This is a separate exercise, not to be done at play time. Put some goodies in your pocket and sit on the floor with your puppy. Invite him to take your special tug toy in his mouth. Don't throw it, just let him take it. It might be helpful if your pup is on a leash. While the toy is in his mouth, offer him the treat. He'll probably spit out the toy to take the food. Say "MY TURN" as soon as he actually begins to release. Take the toy, give the treat. After he swallows the food, give the toy back and begin to play again. When he can give and take quickly 80-90% of the time, you can start saying "MY TURN" without showing the food. The food comes out of hiding when you get the toy back. Then teach your dog to play the lottery by giving the treat randomly.