

***Redlion* Chesapeakes & Labradors**

Dogs for hunting, show & field competition and companions

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Tug of War with your Dog

When people ask me if they can do tug of war with their puppy or dog, I always answer NO. I say this because there are many people who really don't go by the "Rules of the Game" and it doesn't work well for them or for a retriever. I don't want people to end up with an aggressive dog, which can easily happen with this game, and/or get bitten. BUT, if you play by the rules, tug games can be a good form of exercise for both of you and fun too.

Playing tug can be done inside or outside in a small area. Tug can be used as a game or as a reward for doing something good. But just know that I still DO NOT recommend tug games for dogs that are already showing aggression toward their owners and objects or for dogs that won't release upon command. Your dog must be able to release the tug object on command before you can play this game.

Steps to follow for Playing Tug of War

1. Pick one special toy to use for tugging and only this one. Make sure it is durable and won't break, etc. Keep this tug toy away from the dog except at the tug play time. It is not to be used any other time. He must know that "tug" can only be done with this toy and when it is there for the game of tug.
2. Choose a command that will alert the dog that you are going to play the Tug Game. Maybe something like "Tug – Tug, or Wanna Tug". Then always start this game with that command.
3. Teach the command "Drop or Give". This can be done in several ways. You can offer a treat or 'another toy' in exchange for the tug toy or you can apply a very slight ear tweak with one hand while holding the toy with the other, saying "Give" as the dog opens his mouth from the ear tweak. Never let the dog drop the tug toy or other toy to the ground, always save "Give" and take it from his mouth with your hand and hold it. I prefer using the "ear tweak" method instead of offering a treat. You can teach this over and over until the dog learns to "Give". I would do this first as a regular part of your obedience practice before you start the tug of war steps. Always take your time and after he releases, praise him a lot, give him the treat or a quick toss of the "other toy" as a reward for releasing. Do this quickly over and over a few times. This also gets your dog interested in complying to "Give" as he knows he will get a reward if he does and that is always pleasant for him!
4. Obedience training is a must before playing tug of war. If your dog grabs the "other toy" and runs away and sits and guards the toy, he is starting to become aggressive and protective. Each time you let him do this it grows "bigger" and shortly changes into growling and then biting. Never chase your dog to catch him or to get the toy. Go back to the collar and leash and teaching the dog to firmly come when called. Then there is no chance for him to start the guarding and aggressive behavior as he knows he can't but must bring it to you.
5. In between the tug of war play, periodically go back to a few minutes of reinforcing your obedience commands as a refresher. Then use the tug of war as a "reward" for doing the obedience behavior well.
6. Dogs can get excited when you bring out that "special tug toy" and grab it before you are ready. This is a no-no. Make him sit for a bit and calm down and wait till he hears you give the command that you have chose to use such as "tug-tug"? Reinforce the sit command for a minute if you need to. Everything with the dog, including play, has to be where you are in control and he has to submit to what you want. Don't let him get to rowdy during the tug play. Like any child, they get excited to so take a quick time-out or stop all together at this point.
7. Teeth and growling during tug play – Once the game is on, dogs will always growl during the tug and they will be using their teeth. Be very careful and never let those teeth get to you. Don't allow the dog to stop and snap and watch where your fingers are on the toy. If there is an accident involving the teeth stop immediately. Ignore the dog for a few minutes until he settles down. If needed make him sit and pet him so he calms down. You CAN expect the dog to growl and sometimes quite ferociously while tugging - that's part of the game & perfectly okay as long as those teeth don't touch you and as long as the person playing is capable of handling what is going on.
8. *Children or people that cannot enforce these rules must **NOT** be allowed to play tug of war with the dog!*

Always supervise the dog and the children carefully!