



Games Dogs Play

1. ***The Shell Game-*** Let the dog see you place a treat/toy under a terra cotta pot w/ hole at bottom (this encourages dogs to use their nose). Use a smelly treat to help dog locate it. Cue dog to “find it!”, when he noses or paws at the pot, praise and allow him to have the treat underneath. Once your dog understands the game, hold the pot in place to encourage him to use his paws. Reward any paw action but encourage a ‘soft paw’-do not allow dog to tip over pot himself. Add one or two more pots and again tell your dog to “find it!” after putting a treat underneath the first pot. If your dog paws or noses the incorrect pot, do not lift it, just say “oops!” and encourage him to keep looking. Stay calm while he searches but sound more excited as he gets closer to the correct pot. Once your dog has mastered this challenge, try shuffling the pots around after hiding the treat!

Many people think that because dogs have such an amazing sense of smell this trick is easy for them but in actuality, to use such a complex sense is very tiring and most dogs do NOT automatically use their nose to find objects. Dogs that track professionally are completely exhausted after an hour or so of intense nose work! This game helps with problem solving, tests their memory, encourages impulse control (have to wait for what they want), and conflict resolution (they don’t always get what they want), also encourages perseverance!

2. ***Find-a-treat-*** Place strongly scented treats in muffin tin, each in its own compartment. Place tennis balls on top of each opening, place tin on floor and let dog figure out how to get the treats! Once the dog figures out the game, you can start putting treats in only a few compartments then work your way down to only one compartment. For very small dogs, we might use an egg carton with small tennis balls or ping pong balls 😊. Another great problem solving, impulse control and confidence building exercise.

3. ***Scuba Dog-*** Toss treats/toys into kiddie pool (or large basin, baby bath, etc) and see if dog will retrieve. Increase the challenge by using toys that will sink to the bottom! Dogs that already love the water LOVE this game. For dogs that are unsure about water, it will encourage them to see water as a good thing and help build their confidence. This is a REALLY fun game with the right dog!

4. ***Building Bridges-*** Lay two pieces of cardboard or two towels on the ground next to each other but not quite touching. Have dog sit on one towel then on your cue have them move to the next towel and sit. Pick up the first towel, move in front of the second then have dog move to the newly placed towel and sit. Keep repeating until you’ve gone across the room or designated area. Since the therapy dogs are so spot-on with their commands, I thought this one might be fun for you guys. The kids, if they are too young to tell the dog to sit, maybe they could at least move the towel around the room?

5. Red Light Green Light- Thought this one would be fun for kids too....encourage dog to move around and walk after giving the cue 'green light!' Then say 'red light sit!' and give treat to the dog once he sits. Cue 'green light!' and move around again. 'Red light sit' and treat for a sit. Challenge the dog(s) to hold the sit longer and longer (and stay calm) before the next 'green light'.

6. Back Track- Show the dog a favorite toy, then place on ground. Gently lead dog away from toy. Cue 'OK!' and release the dog to go find toy. Next time use different location and walk dog further and further away from toy. Once the dog understands the game, hide the toy in more challenging locations. Have the kids drag the toy along the ground on their way to hiding it so the toy leaves a scent trail for the dog to follow!

7. Buried Treasure- Get a large bowl, basin or tub and fill with tennis balls or whiffle balls (we use ping pong balls for the little guys). You can toss in a smelly treat and cue the dog to "find it!" He will have a challenge fishing out the treat. Builds confidence in timid dogs because the movement and noise of the balls moving around can be a little spooky but good things will come from being brave!