

# Dog training Games

*By Jeff Coltenback*

The following games are some suggestions that can help stimulate a dog both mentally and physically. We often get so preoccupied with exercise and physical stimulation that we forget about the positive effect that mental stimulation has on a dog's behavior. All training games should have obedience incorporated to whatever game it is that you are engaging in. Quite simply, the dog should perform an obedience command before the game begins. And, we should always start and end play. Stimulating a dog both mentally and physically promotes overall mental health!

**Fetch** – pretty self explanatory. The important note here is to make sure you are making the dog perform obedience commands before each throw of the ball or object. In other words, before you toss the ball, make the dog sit. You can use lay down or even stay as well. The dog will benefit more from structured play.

**Tug** – Tug is an all time favorite for many breeds of dog. Playing tug is often frowned upon because of the myth that it causes aggression. This just simply isn't true. Would I play tug with an aggressive dog? I probably would not initially. But, the aggression was already present. Tug doesn't cause aggression. Playing tug with a well mannered dog can be very fun and rewarding for the dog. The key when playing tug is to make sure you can win the game. Teaching a dog the "drop it" or "out" command, so he drops what's in his mouth allows you to be able to win the game. If you can't win at tug with your dog, than you probably shouldn't engage in such a game. But, tug can be very fun and stimulating to your dog.

**Stairs** – This is a great game when there is inclement weather that prohibits you going outside. Long, cold winters or rainstorms, etc may lead to inactivity. Stairs is a game often played with two caretakers and the dog. Simply have one of you at the bottom and the other person at the top of the stairs. Give the dog the "come" command in alternating turns. When the dog gets to you, make her sit or lay down. Then offer a treat. Then, the person at the other end of the stairs would do the same. This exercise, over the course of as little as 5 minutes, will stimulate the dog mentally and physically. The best of all, the dog is working for you, enjoying herself and getting lots of praise and rewards!

**Doggy in the middle** – Just like the old fashioned game, monkey in the middle, this game is similar to the stairs game. The difference here, is you have the whole family participate. The family can position themselves in a large room or yard and perform the same "game" as noted above in the stairs game. This is fun for the whole family!

**Hide 'n' seek** – This is a great game to teach or reinforce the come command. One person holds the dog in place while the other person goes and hides somewhere. It can be a different room if you're inside. If you're outside, you can hide behind a tree or a bush. Then the "hider" (once hidden) starts calling the dog (i.e. "fido come"). When the dog finds the "hider" the dog should be lavished with gratuitous praise and/or treats. Take turns. The dog will have a blast and you will reinforce one of the most important commands.

**Find It** – This game is especially beneficial for scent hounds, but all breed will love this game. Take about 20 colored solo cups and place them upside down in a large circle. Place treats randomly in some of the cups. Bring the dog to one of the cups that has a treat in it. Knock over the cup exposing the treat and allow the dog to eat the reward. Do this a few times. Then start saying "find it". Continue to "help" the dog find the treats until the dog begins knocking cups over on her own. Once this behavior is solidified, put fewer treats in the cups and the dog will "find it". This is a great mentally stimulating game! You might want to "youtube" it! 😊

**Sand-digging** – This great is great for the dog that tears up your yard or flower beds. Dogs dig for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it's bored. Sometimes it's a breed trait – small terriers and hunters. We often get preoccupied with fixing problem behaviors. Sometimes, it's better to support the dog's natural instinct to dig. So, what we do is similar to "find it". The difference here is that we need to teach the dog where it is appropriate to dig. So, take a small area in the yard and put some railroad ties or 2x4 pieces of wood in a square. Fill it with play sand, which can be found at most home improvement stores. Then bury some toys in the sand. Give the dog a command to get the toy. You can use "find it" like above. Here the reward is in finding the toy. You may have to dig up a few toys first to teach your dog where to dig. The key here is to reprimand your dog for digging in "restricted" areas and the praise/reward will occur in the designated area. After a while, your dog will be conditioned to dig in the appropriate area.