



# Webinar 4 - Toy Play and Teaching A Retrieve With Food

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

dog, toy, play, ball, object, tugging, behavior, reward, bit, bowl, cookies, agility, put, good, work, frodo, reinforcement, hand, food, question

Oh

we're good. Oh, here we are. Okay, turn to get read. Alright everybody, we are here today to talk about what toy play is and isn't. And also

to go over a really handy behavior that I have been working on with my puppy, and that you can teach a dog of any age that will help you develop, retrieve to hand. So first, let's talk about what toy play is. And isn't because there's a lot of stress, I think, for a lot of us as agility handlers when it comes to Toy Play, because

somewhere along the line, we were either told or led to believe, or maybe we even just develop the belief ourselves that your dog has to play with you with a toy in order to be a good agility dog. And while Toy Play is something that I work hard to develop, and while it's something that I enjoy, and while it's something that's important to me, I don't think that it's critical that your dog have toy drive to play with you in order to be a good agility dog. So, Toy Play can be something that your dog enjoys for the sake



of just playing with you in the house. Maybe your dog enjoys playing with toys by itself. But if your dog does not want to play with toys,

at a competition or in class, the way it does at home, that doesn't mean that it's not going to be a great agility dog. Now, there are some caveats to that if you if you can get your dog to play with you with toys at home, during training in the context of agility training, and you can get your dog to play with you in class a particular way. But you can't get your dog to play with you at a competition or a fun match, it may be a pretty clear sign that your dog is overwhelmed in the environment. Photo comm Frodo Frodo Frodo get away from all the chords Good job, it may be assigned to you that your dog is overwhelmed. And you may need to take some steps to help your dog be less overwhelmed or stress in that environment.

But if your dog just does not want to play with you with toys, the way that you have seen, or the way that you have been told your dog must play with you with toys again, it's not a deal breaker. So what does play actually look like? And by the way, if you're watching on Facebook, you can feel free to ask a question, or leave a comment. And also if you're looking, viewing it the website at [agility challenge.com](https://www.theagilitychallenge.com) forward slash webinars, again, feel free to ask a question or leave a comment.

Frodo, there's so many chords over there. And if he busts through, it's gonna be a disaster, Frodo come from a good job. And he really likes Maddie. So lay down, just stay over here stay away from the courts. Okay, so Toy Play can look like a lot of different things. And I think that the most common form of Toy Play is tugging. So a lot of us think that our dogs need to be attached to the other end of a toy that is also attached to us and be tugging on that toy for it to count as play. And I do enjoy tugging. But tugging is not the only form of play. So play really can be any interaction between you and your dog.

- 2 -

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And it does not need to involve a toy. But we are talking about toy play today. So in this case, Toy Play is going to be any interaction that you and your dog have with each other where there's an object involved. It's not an agility obstacle. So this is a toy. This is some it's called the Holy Roller. And it's something that most of us recognize as a toy. And we play with play with it with our dogs and some dogs enjoy having it tossed to them. Some dogs like chasing it from some, excuse me some dogs like tugging with it, right? Get it get it get Yes, good job. Good job. Good job. Good job. Good job, okay.

And some dogs just like dropping it at your feet repeatedly and having you bump it at them some dogs like chewing on it. And those are all valid forms of interaction. But you could also have a dog that

interacts with you with a flyswatter. Or maybe you have a dog that and you've got to check it stick those sticks that you use to launch a ball even further. And maybe your dog enjoys playing with the stick more than enjoys chasing the ball. So a toy, in this case can be really anything that you and your dog can interact with together, whether you're throwing it for them and having them bring it back or whether you're waving it around and having them chase it or whether they are actually tugging on it. So pay does not just mean tugging play can mean Frodo Frodo. Where's your toy? Get your toy? Yeah, come over. Oh, yeah. Okay.

So toy play this, this is a smaller Holy Roller, it's not really easy to see. But it can Toy Play could also just be maybe the dog doesn't really like being touched. Maybe it's not really into tugging, it could just be you celebrating the dog having a good time with this object near you. Could you tweet to me? Did you get your toys to get your toy? Did you get your toy? That's some good ready get your toy toy? Yes, that's a good job. That's a good job. That's a good job. So for a long time, for example, Frodo was not really into tugging he, I don't know if he felt threatened by it, or if it made him feel too vulnerable. So I



didn't bother to try and grab the toy and shake it around. Get your toy, but he likes already get your toy. Yeah, that's a good job. Get your toy. You're doing good. You're gonna do a good job. Yeah, that's so good. That's so good. Yeah, yeah, but he likes mouthing it. Well, like clap.

And he likes catching it. So even if they don't like tugging, there's still some other fun ways that you can make them feel proud about themselves and let them know that you are paying attention to them. And that you think that this object is valuable as an object of interest that way they do.

Let's see, I just fell off the train of thought.

Questions.

Questions are always nice, because they help draw my thoughts out of me. But that was the big thing I wanted to wanted to talk about because I had a lesson with a student last weekend, and we talked a lot about Toy Play. And, and some people can put a lot of pressure on their dogs to tug, you know, you're leaning over the top of your dog, and you're really in their face and some dogs, that that's just really doesn't work for them. So if you are trying to engage your dog in Toy Play, getting down on the ground can be really helpful. And you'll be a lot less threatening to them. If you're down on the ground. And again, they don't have to be interested in tugging. And if they if you are working on tugging, it doesn't have to be real hard, violent tugging could just be you know, just maybe hook your finger in it and let them win a lot. Yeah, job. So this is a form of Toy Play, even though it doesn't involve hugging, the two of us are paying attention to one another, the dog comes back, he finds the object valuable it, He's wagging his tail, he finds it rewarding. And it's also something that I can place on the course in training strategically to help get a concept across. And I can take it to the ring with me, although this is a little



bit, I don't really take these to the ring with me because he doesn't hold on to them real well. And then they bounce around and get in somebody else's way. So there are better toys than this for that. But in training, it's something that I can strategically place I can toss it. So if I'm working on contacts or weaves or sending him ahead of me for a behavior, it's a way for me to get a reward to him, there's a little bit better than food. Because if you throw a piece of food, that usually doesn't weigh very much, it's usually hard to see. So a toy can be bigger, it can be brighter, it has a little bit more heft to it, so you can throw it and you can choose a toy that has a handle on it so that when it lands, it doesn't roll and things like that. But the the important thing here is for you to figure out what kind of play your dog enjoys, and interact with the dog the way the dog wants to interact with the toy. Now, obviously, you might have some big goals to tug with the dog. And that may come along. But it may not come along until you figure out how the dog wants to interact with the toy first, and interact with the dog with this object the way that the dog wants to play with it. So this is still play. I'm not super involved in it. I'm not tugging, I'm not really looking at the dog too much. And Frodo is a pretty good example. Because he didn't really want to play with toys when he was a puppy. He was pretty easily intimidated. And so tagging was was pretty out of the question for quite a while with him. And certainly at an event tagging was out of the question because he is really visual and he likes to watch. So it was really difficult for him to tug on a toy facing me and still keep visual tabs on what was going on around him. So I had to compromise and let him talk in a way that let him watch what was going on as well as at the same time that he was talking. So that's the big thing. And I don't Yeah.

Too much pressure besides obvious like departure?

It's a good question.



So usually, if it's too much pressure.

That's a good question. How do I know how do I know it's too much pressure. Usually there's my dogs get kind of a look of concern on their face. Some dogs are a little bit more expressive than others. But I usually can look at them and tell that they're starting to shrink well before departure happens.

So if they've taken off and then

it was it's kind of like that

Add Course stress discussion or topic that I covered by the time they take off, something has been brewing. And if they take off, then they they have had too much pressure on them for a while. So usually the first signs of too much pressure for my dogs because they're Border Collies is that they'll usually duck their head a little bit, or there'll be a very slight hesitation

or, or just sort of a look in their eye, they, they all the little muscles around their eyes move just so and you can just kind of tell that they're skeptical. So you have to be able to watch your dog and read their body language and watch for the first signs of pressure on them. Because by the time they've departed, they, they felt some pressure for a while. And again, some dogs are more demonstrative than others.

But usually,

one thing that I have worked on quite a bit with, with Frodo and I'm working on quite a bit with the puppy is having them jump on me. And of course, that's a kind of a big no no behavior for pet dog



people, because they don't want dogs jumping on people. But I work a lot on having them come in and jump up on me and reward them a lot with food when they're young. And with Frodo had to kind of go backtrack and work on that. Because it can be really intimidating for a lot of dogs to come in that close and be the ones to approach us and have that ventral ventral chest to chest contact. So I do work a lot on having them come into my physical space so that they're comfortable coming into me when maybe they'd rather stay out a little further away and have their little personal bubble.

So things like that can help because sometimes, it's just physical proximity that makes it tough for them to to engage in Toy Play. So you can do things like have them come in and jump up on you and feed them a bunch of cookies while they've got their front legs on you. You can also use a longer toy, a toy that's on a three or four foot rope, so that they don't have to come in close to you to play.

And I will probably work on both of those things together help with the toy play by having a longer toy, but at the same time, have them constantly come in come in come in come in. And the herding dogs are seem to be particularly prone to the personal space issue. So having them constantly come in and get rewarded for being very, very close and in a uncomfortable situation is pretty important. And also,

following the rules of good dog language. This is pretty intimidating for dogs. And another sign by the way that that maybe there's too much pressure is that there's some lip licking going on. And Christopher was doing that right now that you can see the whites of his eyes, there's a little bit of lip licking.

And he's backing up primarily because that's the behavior he's been taught. But also because it can be a little bit uncomfortable if you step into them. So if you're trying to play with a dog like this, and it's too



intimidating, then try turning and playing with them without facing them. Get down low and play with them. Just try not to hover over the top of them. And try and try and be the weak one in this situation. Don't you don't have to.

You don't have to be the ruler here. Let them win a lot when they do tug. Really praise them if they shake a toy. All those little things that

encourage them to kind of come out of their shell can be helpful. I'm not sure if that answers the question fully. But that's a good start, I think is to really watch them closely for lip licking or yawning or turning their head away from you and not wanting to look at you backing away from your personal space, those can be signs that you've put too much pressure on them. And also,

play should be easy. And I know that we

that sounds kind of odd because I do spend a lot of time working on behaviors that will help the dog enjoy play. But the play itself should feel pretty easy. You shouldn't feel like you're working at it. Because if you are forcing it, then

then the dog is going to feel some pressure. And really if you if you want good play, you have to sort of tickle it, you have to sort of you have to find out how to tickle your dog's funny bone. And sometimes that requires a really light touch. And sometimes you have to really think out of the box. Some dogs like it when you pick up wads of grass and throw it in the air. Some dogs like really direct play some dogs really like to pounce on you and be really physical and maybe you're not that kind of person. But that's what they want. So sometimes it's you that has to come out of your shell but but really a really good



way to think about it is that you, it should be easy in the sense that it shouldn't feel forced. You should be looking at the dog and trying to tickle their funny bone and figure out what makes them curious and what makes them interested and what will make them pester you for more.

And that can take a long time. Now, having said that I do work a lot to teach toy drive and Toy Play and retrieve but working a lot at something spending a lot of time training something is different than trying to force something. So by the time I take

toy play or behavior with an object into a more array

housing environment. It's had a large history of reinforcement in a quieter environment, and then a less quiet, more arousing environment, and then a more arousing environment and a more arousing environment. So one of the things that I wanted to bring up today is the idea that

toy play is a behavior. So instead of instead of thinking, okay, how am I going to teach my dog to play with a toy? Sit back and think about how can I make an otherwise neutral object really rewarding for my dog to interact with in a specific way? So tugging for example, if I want to teach my dog to pull hard on an object that I'm holding on to, then how would I break down that behavior so that I could reward it with food? So maybe my dog, you know, some puppies just like, Can you even see her on the camera? Is she gone? So like, she just came with a toy in her mouth, basically. So teaching her to play with toys, didn't really mean that just sort of happened.

But Frodo didn't like to tug. So I had to think okay, well, what is tugging will tugging is pulling on an object that I am holding on to, or pulling on a rope that's tied to a post. So how would you really like



foods? So how would I teach a dog to tug in a way that looks like play? You know, he's tugging viciously? Maybe he's what does that even mean? He's Wang. He's shaking his head around. He's growling some he's really yanking on the toy. So how can I teach that. So I start with food. And I start by giving him a cookie, if he touches the object that I've chosen,

with his nose, and then doing that 100 times over the course of several days, and then rewarding him for picking it up with his mouth, and then rewarding him for picking it up. While I'm holding it, maybe it's a rope toy, and I reward him for, for grabbing it while I'm holding it. And then I reward for increasingly firmer grabs of the toy. And then I let go and let him have it. And if he shakes it just a tiny bit, then I'll give him a huge jackpot with food and a lot of praise. So I can develop that tugging as a behavior and it becomes rewarding, not because the dog naturally necessarily enjoyed it. But because a lot of reinforcement was put into it. So a lot of effort was put into it. And a lot of work and time was put into it. But I never forced it in the sense that I never asked him to do more than he was comfortable doing. So that sort of leads into my next bit here and I have to get a prop. So I will be right back.

This is where we might want to the closer shot.

Okay,

so one of the tricks that I and I'm going to use Frodo because Frodo is really bad at retrieving the toy to hand he will chase a ball that I've thrown, and he'll go grab it, but he'll bring it to within about 10 feet of me, and then he'll drop it and back up a few feet and look at it like okay, I brought it far enough. Now, the ball is literally in your court. So one of the things that I worked on with the puppy, and I've just kind of let slide with the older dogs. Frodo in particular is the idea of retrieving to hand. So this is a really



great way to develop toy drive with your food motivated dog. Because again, the main benefits of having a dog that is toy motivated, is that you have an object that you can throw further, that's more visible. And that it's cheaper, because you're not the dogs not consuming a lot of cheese and the dog is also not going to get fat. And you can also place this on course, strategically, if you want to reward the dog at the end of the week pulls or reward the dog at the end of a contact or use it as a distraction if you're trying to work on some distraction training. So a distraction and a reinforcement are essentially the same thing. It's just an object that the dog finds valuable. It could be a wooden spoon, it doesn't have to be a tennis ball, it could be a pill bottle, a wooden spoon.

I don't know I probably you guys can think of some other objects that you wouldn't normally think of as toys, but that you could build value in your dog's mind for touching or grabbing or holding or picking up. So in this case, I'm using a little itty bitty ball. And I have a bowl but I could start with

I don't know another object and a bigger bowl if the dog has not done it before. So I would start with a bowl a food bowl, that's enough that it would be easy for the dog to drop the ball in the bowl because that's what we're going to do. And again, it doesn't have to be a ball. It could be an empty pill bottle. It could be a block of wood. It could be a ball of tin foil, it really could be anything you want it to be. I'm going to choose a ball because if I have a dog that is highly food motivated, but not toy motivated, then I'm going to eat

is the same object that I want to eventually use on course. And I can probably change to other objects later. But I'm going to use the ball because I'll get pretty far with it. So I'm also going to load up treats. See how far we get with this?



Okay, hopefully you guys can see it. So it's been a while. And also, there's some other tricks that may complicate this. But what I'm going to do is put the ball on the ground and the ball on the ground, and then I'm going to reward Frodo in the bowl if he puts the ball in the bowl. And of course, this doesn't happen immediately. So at first, you're going to have to reward the dog for picking up the ball, and then picking up the ball and bringing it closer to the bowl, and then picking up the ball and getting it in the bowl. But for the most part, your cookie should come near or in to the bowl. So I've got my cookies. I've got my ball. I've got my bowl. Yes, that's pretty good for a start.

Yes.

Yay. Very good. That's our super duper.

Yes, very nice. So I put I just gently put the ball down. Yes, good job. And he's done this for a while. It's been a while, but he's done it before. So you can see that he's very purposeful about picking up the ball and putting it in the bowl. So I would not recommend that you use a toy that's fluffy or fun to mouth at or throw around because that does make it a little bit harder. And there is usually a lot of throwing the object around and in an attempt to get it close to the bowl, and don't reward that because it doesn't ever

result in a job and what you want. Okay, so this might take a few training sessions. But once you've got it, what I'm going to do once I've got it, what I'm going to do is hold the bowl in my hand. So if I've been using a larger bowl, I'll switch to a smaller bowl. Make sure the dog can do that. And then I'm going to hold the bowl in my hand right about here and put the ball out

Yes, very nice.



Yes, super duper.

Good job and make sure I can he can do it in both hands.

Yes, good job. The cookies in both pockets.

Yeah, very nice.

Yeah, super duper.

Switch hands again, so you guys can see better.

Yes, good job.

Yes. Now what I'm going to do is place the ball and get rid of the ball.

And get my hand back out there. It's like Wait, where's the where's the bowl?

Yes. Good job.

That's cute.

Yes, very nice. Super duper.



Yes. Good job. All right. Now I'm going to switch cookies. Try the other hand. Oops, let's try it again.

You lost the plot photo.

So if this happens, I'll give him one more try. He's a little confused.

So we'll bring the ball back out.

So that he has a target? Yes. Good job. And then I'll put it in my hand again.

Yes, good job.

And then I'll try moving the ball away again.

Almost. Yes. Good job. And I'm helping him a little bit. Can you see the ball? Yeah. My now.

Oh,

it's a bummer.

Well, people can go to the website. I pick up my cookies.

Okay, we're still on the website, though. Yeah.



We're still streaming.

Okay.

All right. So anyways, that that's kind of a good place to end for people who are on the Facebook feed.

They're gonna wonder how did this and

what's the last step? Okay. So and they can also catch it on the replay.

So what I've got here is a situation where I can work on bringing it to my hand, specifically,

hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times for cookies and I can move my hand around and help him

good job.

I'm not gonna do that forever. My hand is the target.

Try again.

Oops, confusing things. Yes. Good job without without throwing the toy 20 3040 feet and if you do this every day for a couple minutes a day. And the dog is getting rewarded for bringing this object to your hand. 20 times a day every day.



For a couple of weeks, you're going to have a dog that maybe isn't toy motivated at all. But they're going to be motivated to bring this object to your hand. So at that point, it's pretty tough to say is the dog toy motivated, or is the dog food motivated,

and doesn't really even matter. But what I have is an object that I can toss increasingly large distances or place out there without any motion even. And the dog is going to be pretty interested in bringing it all the way back. Now I have to keep this behavior strong by continuing to reinforce the dog for dropping it in my hand, and keeping it up maybe with the bowl game without the ball with the ball without the ball. But at the end of the day, I've used food to create value for an object that the dog interacts with, in a pretty specific way. With me, so that is toy play. But the dog doesn't have to tug, it doesn't have to be crazy about the toy, it just has to be interested in interacting with me in a particular way for a reward. So that behavior is a super useful behavior, because you can create value for the object.

And it doesn't matter what the object is, it doesn't have to be a super interesting object. In fact, the less interesting it is the better. So with my puppy who isn't available today, for us, he does have a whole lot of toy drive, he's very interested in toys. But naturally, he was interested in getting the toy and then going in the opposite direction with the toy, which is not convenient for training, if you have just a couple minutes to train, and you're spending 75% of that time trying to get your puppy to bring the toy back, you're not going to be very effective as a trainer. So we worked a lot on put the ball in a bowl, put the ball in a bowl, put the ball in a bowl, make it really rewarding with food, and then transfer to a holy roller, put that in the in the hand, put it in the hand, put it in the hand, both hands, and then more interesting toys that are much more difficult for him because he really would like to run away with them and shake them and play with them.



So that was kind of what I wanted to talk about today. First of all, don't stress out if your dog doesn't interact with the toy the way everybody thinks they should, or the way the big top trainers say they should. Because that does not make or break your agility success with your dog, if your dog doesn't want to tug. There are some pretty good reasons that you might want to work on helping your dog be a little bit more relaxed and carefree in an environment. But that doesn't mean they have to be tugging. And also teaching them to put a ball in a bowl or an object in a bowl and then into your hand is a very, very, very good way to get a lot of history, a big history of reinforcement built up for a very specific behavior that translates to fetching a toy or playing with a toy. Because once you have really pumped a lot of value into that object, when you toss it and your dog brings it back to you and puts it eagerly in your hand and asks you to do it again, doesn't matter if the dog popped out of the womb being interested in that or if you've got that through the process of training. And even if the dog does have a natural interest, I am for sure going to pump a lot of value into it through training. First of all, because I think it's fun, it's a great way to be interacting with the dog intensely every day, oops, just got a cramp in my foot. And also, it's a very useful agility behavior. So I think that's all I've got.

If you guys have any questions, we had one good question.

One other one, I think you answered it. But just to double check, if you have a dog was primarily food motivated. You've been working on building drive for play? How do you start to integrate your ability training sessions as report? So I would do this first?

I don't know if you guys heard the question. So let's see if I can remember the question. If you have a dog that's really food motivated, how do you start to integrate toy play into your agility training session.



So I would 100% be working on ball in the bowl ball in the bowl ball in the bowl in the house. And then I would bring it out here to my training space. And I would do the same thing out in the training space, just sit on the ground in the dirt or the grass or get a stool or something so that you can get low. And I would work on this behavior. Again, again, again, get to the point where you don't need the bowl and you can just do it ball to the hand. Put the ball on the ground, have the dog pick it up super duper, lots of praise, lots of cookies, and then start working on increasing the distance. See if you can throw it 10 feet and have the dog bring it back for a cookie. And again, do it three or four or five times. Yeah, good job. You have to bring it back all the way. That's very cute.

All right, well, that's something all right.

And then and then when the dog then started sort of building more into the chain, so then ask the dog for a sit and when the dog sits, you can toss say yes okay, toss the ball, the dog just a short distance the dog brings the ball back, puts it in your hand gets that cookie. You can ask the dog to take a jump and then drop the ball on the ground or toss the ball a short distance. Have the dog bring it

back to your hand and then give them a cookie. So you you basically you take that behavior that you've pumped a lot of reinforcement into with food. So the end, the end reinforcement is still going to be food, but you have the ball in the middle before the food, if that makes sense.

Almost.

So hopefully that answers that question, I would take that same behavior. And just make it really, really strong really, really fun for the dog food is still the ultimate reward. But you're basically taking this



behavior and putting it at the end of what other behaviors you're working on as a reinforcement. So you end up with the dog doesn't agility obstacle, it does a set of weaves it does a short sequence, you throw the ball, dog gets the ball brings the ball back to hand, and then you produce a cookie. Okay? I'm not really a fan of the Lotus balls, they, they can be nice, but I think this is more effective, using the food to teach the dog to bring the obstacle the object back to you. And then you don't have to stuffed the Lotus ball with food all the time. Just put it in your pocket, have the dog bring the ball to you, and they get the they get the food for bringing the ball back to you.

And again, they don't have to take a day in their lives. They they this is this can be enough. I mean, he's clearly wanting me to interact with him. He's paying attention to me, he's not wandering off. What do I care if he never ever wants to talk ever.

It is fun for me. But in my case, I have other dogs who are interested in tugging. But also this is enough. This is enough. It's a good reward. It's got a large history of reinforcement behind it that I've put into it. And there's a lot of confidence on his part, that if he brings this object to me, he's pretty likely to get reinforced for it. And since I've put 1000 cookies into it, or 10,000 cookies into it, I can coast a little bit and get away with the behavior a little bit without giving him a cookie so long as I make sure that you know, 90% of the time I'm still following through with a cookie.

Good question. Anyone else? No. Okay. All right, guys. Thank you for asking some questions.

I'll post the replay at the website. And I'm sure there'll be more questions.

So until next Wednesday, that's it