

Incorporating Play into Training

Incorporating play into your training sessions has many benefits, such as making training more fun, increasing your dog's confidence and helping to strengthen the bond between you and your dog. For safety, be sure you are always practicing with your dog on leash or in a safe, enclosed area. Here are a few ideas on games you can play while completing Training practice outside of class:

- **Total Recall-** This game can help strengthen your dog's Come when Called as well as reinforce a quick return to Heel. Begin by tossing a treat out in front of you and release your dog to go get it. Next, call him back to you. On his way back, draw him in with another treat and spin around so he ends in Heel position, then reward, release and repeat.
- **Rush Hour-** This game can improve your dog's Heel as well as moving Focus. Begin by cuing your dog to Heel and walk at a normal pace. Next, slow your pace to a crawl (like rush hour traffic!), then speed up. You will continue to change your pace in Heel, adding in stops with auto-sits as well. The goal is to keep the connection with your dog and keep him focused on you throughout the Heel.
- **The Finish Line-** This game can help improve your Heel and Loose Leash Walk as well as help build impulse control. Place an item your dog enjoys (treats, favorite toy, etc.) at the end of your hallway, driveway or other open area. Begin on the opposite end of the area, away from the item, with your dog on-leash and begin Heeling or Loose Leash Walking towards the item. The goal is to be able to Heel or Loose Leash Walk, without your dog pulling to get to the item. If you successfully make it to the item without your dog pulling, the dog earns the item as the reward. If your dog pulls along the way, immediately turn around and go back to the starting line. Remember, this is supposed to be fun, so if your dog is struggling, help them out. Either remove the item and try again, or offer a brain break if they are getting frustrated.
- **Red Rover-** This game can help improve Place. Begin with two beds or mats set approximately 5 feet apart. Cue your dog to Place and point to one of the beds. Mark and reward. Next, ask him to Place on the other bed. You will continue to cue your dog to Place, back and forth, between the two beds. As you are successful, begin to increase the distance between the two beds or even add a third bed.
- **Leapfrog-** Like the game played in class, you will practice "leaping" past distractions while out and about during walks. The distractions could be other people, trash, dropped food, etc. The goal is to maintain Heel and Focus while passing the distractions. Remember, for difficult distractions, cue a Switch to place your dog on the opposite side of your body from the distractions. The goal is to be able to pass the distractions at a closer proximity and improve moving Focus each time you practice.