



DOG TRAINERS INTRODUCTION TO DOG-GAMES

The Dog-Games website www.dog-games.co.uk has been set up to promote and give training advice on a variety of new dog games that pet dog owners can train their dogs to do using very little specialised equipment. These are fresh and informative ideas for revitalising pet dog training both in the UK and elsewhere in the world.

- **Eight different Games for dogs to play** – These are “Recall”, “Bounce”, “Round”, “Hand”, “Touch”, “Bounce & Round”, “Bounce & Hand”, and “Bounce & Touch”. A full description of these Games and how to train dogs to do them can be found on our web site page – <http://www.dog-games.co.uk/doggames.htm> or a shortened description can be printed off by logging on to <http://www.dog-games.co.uk/summaryofgames.htm>
- **No rules or restrictions apart from the dog’s welfare being paramount.** These Dog-Games are constructed in such a way as to encourage each and every dog to reach its own potential – both mentally and physically. So long as the safety of the dog, the handler, and the other dogs and humans around it are not compromised, there are no long lists of do’s and don’ts.
- **Structured training** – The website sets out the various stages of training in a well-structured format, whatever the Game. The dog first learns the exercise; then learns to be consistent; distractions of a dog running nearby are then added; it is then taught to cope with passing another dog while doing the Game (apart from the Dog-Games Recall and Bounce); and throughout all the Games the dog learns to generalise where and when he does the Game.
- **All the training is explained using positive reward based methods, rather than coercive techniques** - Once the handler sees how effective these non-intrusive training methods are they begin to adopt these principals in other aspects of the dog’s life, improving the relationship between human and dog as each develops a deeper understanding of the other.
- **Dog motivation and well-being** – Dog-Games actively encourages handlers to use, and experiment with, a wide range of different motivators to reward the dog for playing the Game correctly. This instant and consistent reward builds up the dog’s confidence and promotes happy associations with not only the Game, but also the environment (including people, dogs and equipment) it finds itself in and near when playing these Games. The consistency of the exact training location combined with the consistent and clear response of their handler quickly reduces dog’s anxiety and stress levels and promotes their deeper understanding and long-term memory of what it is being taught.
- **No competitive atmosphere** – Each dog learns and is rewarded for its own success in doing the Game - it’s speed, performance etc is not compared to any other dog. Also, because there is no special witness/tester (eg a family member, friend or trainer can be one) the handler is far less likely to become anxious or stressed, helping the dog not to pick up these negative emotions.
- **Motivation for the handlers** – Each stage of the training is rewarded with colour-coded certificates; the dog is also awarded a different design of rosette when it achieves a level of the Game (ie Starters, Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum), and an engraved silver-plated trophy is sent to those dogs that reach Platinum level. These different marks of achievement help to keep handlers’ motivation high in class, and also help them to recognise their dog’s abilities and progress rather than be disheartened by the dog’s so called “failures”.
- **Flexibility of where dogs can be trained and tested – at Home, Dog Clubs, Behaviourists, Rehoming Centres etc** – Individuals can choose to train by themselves, or with friends, and ask someone to witness their attempts (Dog-Games requires no special testers or witnesses). Others prefer to learn about the Games with trainers and will join their local club and work in a class environment. As well as bringing new people into the clubs, the Dog-Games training and tests can either be done on a regular basis or used to break the routine that some clubs can fall into from time to time – especially those classes where the handlers come to a dog club for the social aspect while the dogs have become bored and have reached a plateau in their training. The introduction of these Games can generate new interest in the training clubs and bring ex-members back to work towards the awards and trophies that Dog-Games provides.

- **We cater for a wide variety of dogs and handlers of all ages and abilities** – “Recall”, the simplest of the Dog-Games, helps to train and motivate handlers who are just starting to train their dogs. Meanwhile, the other Games add certain degrees of difficulty as the handler and dogs confidence and ability increases (eg jumping small hurdles; retrieving), and encourages the use of clickers and target sticks in the Games of Round, and Touch. Dogs can attempt any of the Games, in any order, as long as they commence from Starter level. It must be emphasised that all the training must be done at each dog’s pace and ability, and that dogs work on Dog-Games that are suitable for the dog’s ability and disposition.
- **Space needed** – While the initial training (eg. learning to retrieve, or use a clicker or target stick) can be done indoors, the majority of the training is done outside using a minimum area of 24-30m long. If the venue is large, it is advisable that plastic netting be used to prevent the dog straying too far from the training area. This secure area enables both handler and dog to relax before training begins as the dog can explore the environment off lead and is less likely to be distracted once the session begins.
- **Dog-Games can be played in any country** – Because there is such flexibility as to where the Games can be taught and played (and with all the equipment being possible to make or buy locally) Dog-Games can be done in any part of the world, not just in the United Kingdom. Certificates, rosettes and trophies can be sent through the post and participating countries have their own Roll Of Honour database on the website listing every dog’s achievements.
- **Costs** – There are no administration or set up fees to begin training Dog-Games Once a dog has successfully completed a Dog-Games certificate the entry form is downloaded from the website, completed by both handler and witness/trainer, and sent to Dog-Games with a small fee (which can be paid by buying credits from the Dog Games Web Shop). The fee is charged to cover the costs of the various awards, processing the form, adding the dog’s details to the website database (which keeps participant’s details completely secure and confidential), posting the award, and to cover the costs of running the website. We would like to emphasise that the entry form and fee are only required when the dog has successfully achieved the Dog-Game criteria for the stage (see Summary of Games on the website).
- **No books to buy** – All the training information is freely available to read and print off without having to invest in any printed matter. This enables pupils to read in advance the training steps that they are about to do with their trainers (ie “homework”) - saving time and avoiding misunderstandings in the busy class environment.
- **Equipment and Storage** – The Games have been specifically designed so that very little specialised equipment needs to be bought or made. All the Games require the use of two poles (such as broom handles) to stick into the ground to mark the start/finish of the Games area. The Games with “Bounce” in their title require four 8” high flyball jumps (although some agility clubs are using very low agility jumps instead) and these can either be bought from <http://members.aol.com/moderndogs/home.htm> or made at home using our website’s template. The jumps are easy to erect and dismantle and can be packed very neatly in a cupboard, boot of a car, or be kept in a bag. The only other equipment needed to do the rest of the Games is a black rubber car mat; a large traffic cone; retrieve articles; and a target box (see Touch Equipment for details). The target box is similar in shape to a flyball box but does not have the expensive trigger mechanism for the tennis ball.
- **Above all, handlers should not hesitate to discuss training methods and learn to trust their instincts about what is the correct way of training their dog (after all they know the dog best. From the very first session they will learn to recognise and understand when their dog is relaxed and ready to play the Games and also learn to recognise if their dog is not interested, or is unable to train due to health or mental problems, that they must stop training that aspect of the Games. In some very rare cases we have found dogs that are unable to cope with even attempting or learning about the simple Recall Game, and the handler has been able to recognise this in the first session. The handlers have been able to see how the dog is not coping well with long-term stress and have begun work on reducing the causes of stress in its everyday life. See our web site for detailed information about stress.**
- **What we have found most satisfying about the Games is that when pet dog owners begin participating in Dog Games, a stronger and deeper understanding of the relationship between the handler and their dog emerges. This often results in a dramatic change in the dog’s behaviour in everyday life as both begin to “work as a team”.**