

The “Bad Dog” Retrieve

Background:

- Dogs love to steal items and start a game of keep-away.
- Any item that is in the possession of another dog is valued.
- When an owner runs at a dog grabbing an item from the dog and “growling” (yelling), the value of the item increases to the dog.
- Items that become valued during the formative puppy months may have increased value throughout the dog’s life.
- Many owners consider their dogs “bad” when, in fact they can use this behavior to positively train a reliable retrieve.

Phase I.

1. When a dog has an item that you do not want her to have, approach slowly, preferably sideways, rather than head-on.
2. Do not look at the coveted item.
3. Praise the dog saying, “Good Dog, Good hold it!”
4. Gently grasp the coveted item with one hand and present a valued treat with the other, inserting a finger into the dog’s mouth to tickle her palate, if necessary.
5. Say, “thank you”, and gently remove the item, immediately feeding the very yummy treat.
6. Immediately offer the item back to the dog, saying, “Take it.”
7. After the dog again grasps the coveted item repeat steps 3-5
8. Offer the item again, repeating the procedure.
9. Put the coveted item out of the dog’s reach for the time being and play with the dog with another toy or do some other activity that is rewarding to the dog.

Phase II.

1. Arm yourself with delectable items and a previously coveted item.
2. Approach the dog offering the item and say, “Take it.”
3. Praise the dog for grabbing the item. Then immediately “trade” the food morsel for the item and practice the “thank you” trick.
4. Offer, trade, and treat a few more times, practicing the “take it”, “hold it,” “thank you” sequence.
5. Put the item on the floor in front of the dog and add ask the dog to “take it” from the floor.
6. Start tossing the item a short distance and reward the dog lavishly for approaching you to trade for the goodies. If you think there is any chance the dog might “snatch and run” do this entire sequence on leash. You may like to add “pick it up” and “bring it” cues at this point.
7. Put the item up and move on to another fun activity with the dog.

Phase III.

Practice the above sequence but now substitute varied items of different size, weight, texture, and shape.

Results

- Your dog will be able to hold and retrieve a variety of items.
- Your dog may bring you items rather than take off with them.
- Stealing and chewing may be replaced with retrieving and holding behaviors.