

HOW WE TRAIN DOGS THAT BARK, LUNGE, PULL & GET DISTRACTED
WITH THE POWER OF 3-MINUTE GAMES

OPTIMISM ROCKS



Absolute Dogs®

Tom Mitchell & Lauren Langman

OPTIMISM ROCKS!!!

GRIT, bravery, desire and passion in dogs.

Confidence is KING for all dogs, but it's even more important for what we affectionately like to call our Naughty But Nice dogs.

Confidence, GRIT, passion and motivation are all intertwined and through our latest findings, creativity, games and more we are going to show you exactly what we mean.

So let's make a start.....

WHAT IS OPTIMISM?

Optimism can be present in all areas of life

We like to think of it as how an individual (dog, person or any other being) perceives a new or ambiguous situation. Do they see it in a positive way or a negative way? How do they judge a novel scenario? Here at absoluteDogs we love to build an OPTIMIST!

In dogs their level of optimism can determine how they react to:

- Another dog, whether that dog is giving ambiguous signals, is a rude dog or is just another very polite and normal dog;
- A new or unusual object (an umbrella, a hat, a new object in the house, even moving an existing object around the house);
- A certain type of person (size, shape, beard, hat, coat or anything new).

EVERYTHING in your dog's world could be 'good' or 'bad', friendly or scary, depending on their level of optimism. Everything in their environment could potentially freak them out.

The pessimist is going to potentially worry about anything and everything and they may deal with that by attacking it or totally shutting down.

OPTIMISM = anything new is nothing to be worried about! Take it all in, enjoy and be happy!

PESSIMISM = anything new is going to hunt me down / eat me / kill me / basically impact me in a negative way.

If you look at your dog, would you say they are an optimist or a pessimist? Of course, they can be different in different situations and it may vary depending on how they feel or where they are. But in general, what do you think?

Whatever your answer, here's where we let you in on an exciting secret, optimism is changeable. We like to think of confidence as being like a muscle! You can change, develop and grow optimism very easily and you can improve your dogs overall confidence in every day life situations.

Through games we will help you understand this key concept and share with you some of our super optimistic top tips to keep your dog tip top, gritty and at their very best! Okay so where do we start....well let's start with the routines or maybe the contrary!

DITCH THE ROUTINE

And increase the downtime!

Dogs are born predicting. Starting with where to find the milk bar, all the way through to when it's time for their walk, when you leave for work and when you're coming home.

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Scarily, the prediction of excitement, the anticipation, can be as good or as bad, as the event itself. Think about looking forward to a big event, the preparation, the anticipation, the planning. How often are you way overtired or stressed when the event happens – you've already burnt out before the anticipated event arrives.

So, prediction is not always a good thing. Whether it is prediction of a good or a bad thing it is exhausting, overarousing and magnifying.

Your dogs will naturally want to find predictors in their lives; in fact they will actively seek them out and they find creative ways to enable them to predict. Wherever and whenever possible don't let this happen. Try to mix it up as much as you can.

Not being predictable is the very start of your optimistic journey. We know that ditching the routine truly works!

Dogs who have less predictable schedules are much happier in everyday life. They are flexible, more chilled out and able to adjust. They find day to day life easier!



GROWING FLEXIBILITY

So, how can you make your dog more FLEXIBLE?

Let's look at just a few options you can change:

- The way you feed. Interactive feeding is the way forward. Please make sure you look at our ditch the food bowl eBook!

- The way you exercise. Think different locations, on lead or off lead, staying at home and doing all round fitness games or figure eight in the supermarket car park. There are so many options.

- Your training routine - how long, how short, where and when - mix it up.

- Your comings and goings on a day to day basis. Human life is usually set to the clock; think creatively about when you leave, what you wear, where you eat your breakfast. Seriously, the possibilities for flexibility are endless.

- How you use objects in your dog's environment. Take a simple stool. Can you get front paws on, rear paws on, head on, head under, a sit on the stool, lean against it, wrap around it? The possibilities are endless. Can your dog do multi behaviours with the same object? Now that's flexible!

Any of the options and to be honest, all of the options above will increase your dog's flexibility (and sometimes yours as well). Thinking outside the box is key to creating a happy, optimistic and easily adjustable dog in every day life! (And thinking inside the box, on top of the box, behind it and underneath it – you get the idea.)

You might worry about how your dog will cope without it's regular walk and regular mealtimes. In reality, ditching the routine can be far less stressful for the dog than us humans. We can find it hard, yes, really, for the humans it can be super tough!

Your dog will be happier and more content once you ditch the routine, as long as you can stick with it, ditching it that is. Let us reiterate, we see more owners than dogs struggle with this! The more you ditch it, the easier it becomes and you will see the benefits flooding in; which will be hugely rewarding for you.



WORKING ON CALM

Not only is it important to ditch the routine and improve flexibility, it's also super important to give your dog DOWNTIME.

We find that this is so under appreciated in an every day dog's life! So what do we mean by working on calm? Well we like the CALMNESS triad, for us this means that we rotate our dogs through CALMNESS. Time for calming activities: to chew; to find food in a snuffle mat; to investigate a stuffed chew; or to find scattered food in the garden and,

of course, time for quality rest. Our dogs' lives should NOT be all about go, go, go, high arousal games and activities, we need to make sure we include great downtime!

We would like you to try to mix calming activities into your dog's day and you'll find your dog is much more able to perform as you need and think smarter. These activities are so super for developing your dog's ability to make good choices - you just need to get started.

THINKING OUT-SIDE OF THE BOX

Here at absoluteDogs you may have noticed that we LOVE creativity...

We love to see you think outside the box. It creates flexibility and boosts CONFIDENCE and makes dogs lives better.

We know that thinking outside of the box will lead to you unlocking the relationship with your dog - endless confidence will be the end result.

It creates flexibility and boosts CONFIDENCE and makes dogs lives better

“ unlocking the relationship with your dog

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As well as ditching the bowl and the routine, consider a few games you could invent (yes you) for building optimism and grit in your dog (sssshhh.....we may let you into a few ideas in a moment).

Don't be afraid to go off task, be a little creative. Flexibility is key and is probably one of the biggest gamechangers for boosting OPTIMISM and GRIT.

GUARD YOUR OWN OPTIMISM

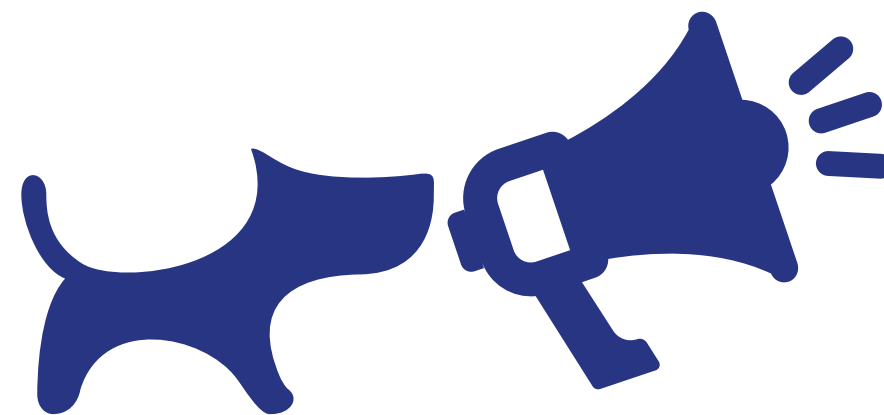
Hands up, now be honest, who has found themselves in a situation that they know isn't quite 100% right for you or your dog? Okay, to help we will give you a few examples:

- attending a particular group training class
- taking your dog to a busy pub lunch
- taking your dog in to the vet waiting room
- leaving your dog in a new kennels when you are away
- taking your dog to a big dog show
- taking your dog to a friends house or walking with a friend when your dog isn't sure
- putting your dog into an awkward family situation

We've all been there at some point, right? This is where we need you to guard your own optimism, take ownership for the things that you can control. It's okay to say NO, you have permission to walk away from a situation.

We will say it again, you have permission to say no! Be confident to stand up and do what is right for you and your dog!

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LISTEN TO YOUR DOG

Canine communication and reading your dog's body language is fundamental to understanding your dog and building an absoluteOptimist.

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Look closely at your dog, be aware of what is his “normal” and then spot the changes in different scenarios. For example they may struggle to take food in some places or sometimes snatch; maybe they stop engaging

in play when that novel person appears around the corner; there could be a sideways glance whilst walking in a worried way; or a shake after an interaction; they may simply tip their head or move their ears or suddenly become still. Did you spot it?

Your dog is giving you vital information that they are unsure in that particular situation. Our dogs are talking all of the time, they are trying to communicate but are you listening?

Once you understand the validity of this form of communication and start to see the all too telling signs, you can really help and make progress with your dog and their optimism.

RECORD KEEPING



Record keeping is KEY!

It is a super useful tool to track progress and will help you to see improvements. It encourages you to look at what skills you have (focus, calmness, etc.) and pinpoint your 'weakest' areas? These are what we really need to GOAL set for.

Pinpoint your 'weakest' areas

We find it helps to keep a training diary. During and straight after each session write down how it went, what could be improved and if you're at the stage where your dog is ready for an increase in difficulty so you can

**It's important to make a plan: to think;
plan; do and review**

identify an area for progression at the next training session. It's important to make a plan: to think; plan; do and review.

Actually write down what you're going to do - and then actually do it (this is the stage that most people miss). Your plan allows you to focus. In turn that helps you to see how far you have come...it's very easy to forget our achievements!

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

People don't like to fail....it's a very normal human affliction

We've already shared a few secrets with you and we are about to share a few more, listen in carefully.....people avoid training and working on a specific struggle because they are scared of failing. As much as you probably don't want to admit it, you know it's true - people don't like to fail....it's a very normal human affliction.

And that brings us to GRIT. What is this GRIT that we keep talking about? Well grit is the ability to keep trying, to work through frustration, to persevere until we succeed and then to persevere until we get better. Grit is essential for successful dog training, for us and our dogs and it goes hand in hand with optimism. Grit means it's ok to get it wrong, to find it hard and to fail. Grit means having the confidence to try again; to have the determination to succeed. Grit is the secret sauce to success and it's possible for us all and our dogs!

**Grit is the secret sauce to success and
it's possible for us all and our dogs!**

So this is where our fear of failure stops. We know that you can take control of your mind. We need to let go of that fear; let go of that situation in the past; let go of other dog owners that we can't control; let go of the embarrassment or the ego and start to take ownership for what we can control and what we can do to improve ourselves! This is where we get our GRIT.

Stop in your tracks. Thinking in the past is no good for you. Get into the present, get into the moment and then we can get a little excited by the future and the exciting opportunities we can nurture and help to create for ourselves.

DITCH THE BOWL

Pour value into the RELATIONSHIP BANK ACCOUNT instead of a bowl

Our dogs wake up every morning with a big pot of value for that day – i.e. food. We can decide where and how that pot of value is divided and feed our dog as and when we want to around our busy lifestyle.

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”

By playing games we pour all that value into the **RELATIONSHIP BANK ACCOUNT** instead of a bowl. The benefits are HUGE and it really is massive for long-term relationship investment with your dog.

It is probably the biggest change you could make to boost your overall relationship because you become the centre of everything fun.

Some tips on how to start that transition of ditching the food bowl, as well as some fun feeding ideas to follow!

1. Initially get your dog to chase the food in your hand – get them pursuing that food, targeting it and trying to get it

2. Then try bowling the food away from your dog and get them to chase after it

3. Restrain them – throw the piece of food ahead, get them interested and then send them to go and get it

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PLAY

Play is one of our favourite things to do with our dogs and for us play = endless relationship and FUN!

Play can come in many, many different formats. Remember that flexibility? You know, thinking outside the box!

So let's think:

- ✓ Tugging
- ✓ Chasing
- ✓ Catching
- ✓ Retrieving
- ✓ Switching & swapping
- ✓ Hunting & finding
- ✓ Sharing
- ✓ Wrestling

There really are no limits to the fun that you guys can have and the creativity you can add into the art of play with your dog.

We always say train the dog in front of you. This is super key for all dogs but most importantly NBN dogs! Not every dog is the same, we all know that - and every dog will play differently and find different aspects of play reinforcing. You need to learn to play in your own way with your dog, we want you to work out what they find FUN? You know 'listen to your dog'.

Our number one tip is to use easy tactics for engaging your dog in play. For example, if your dog loves to play with tug toys then use

longer chaser tugs to allow some distance for the dogs.

Try to be dynamic and most importantly REAL. Authentic play is key and being your best authentic self is important!

The benefits of play:

- Play boosts motivation: yours and your dogs!
- Play can change the energy and dynamic in a simple yet effective way
- It improves relationship. Those who play together stay together. It's fun, it will make you laugh and you will have so much more energy after you play
- More focus, more understanding and more clarity with your dog and how they work
- Great rewards
- A better vision of canine communication and body language
- A distraction when the environment is challenging
- A tool to 'take on the road'

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

Positive reinforcement and games-based training

Our 3-minute games are so super cool and fun. Games provide super awesome learning for dogs, without them even realising they are training.

Before we add some more games to that ever growing toolkit we just want to say one thing. We're normally all about 'can do' positive action and solutions. Unusually we want to give you a 'don't do'. It's not like us but, when we're talking about CONFIDENCE and GRIT, we think it's an important 'don't'.

In all of the games and in life generally to be honest, try not to correct or stop your dog from being inquisitive. We see this happen all too often, a dog is just gently being inquisitive

and immediately they are shot down by their owner immediately killing any inquisitive nature that they ever had! Try to guard the optimism. That doesn't mean you can't gently interrupt behaviour or distract, but just go easy – praise the behaviour that you do want, rather than criticise, however gently, the behaviour that you don't want. For sensitive dogs, this change can make all the difference.

So, now for the really nitty gritty stuff: even more games, games, games.....

Okay, we've shared with you the importance of play, so naturally it follows that we should give you additional and exciting novel GAMES for building optimism and grit.

Here's what we want you to do:

TASK



Write down your struggles:

Which areas do you really need to work on?

Make that area your focus for the next 3 weeks - we like to think of our goals and plans in 3 week blocks!

Write down some strategies to help you get there.

For example, you may have noticed that your dog is fearful of novelty or worried by new noises.... So guess what we are going to do over the next 3 weeks..... yup, you guessed it - our dog is going to earn some of his food from working on exactly that struggle. You could work on
GAME 2: the noise box.

GAME 1

PLAY MAGIC, LET'S PLAY!

Fill the house with your favourite smells, maybe it's a lavender diffuser or an energy spray, turn on some motivational music and a few times a week for the length of just one track enjoy the art of play: be present; play for fun; play for energy and enjoy the moment with your dog! Those that play together, stay together.

Play should be pressure free, remember it's fun, so if you're feeling pressure your dog may be feeling pressure and sometimes you may need to just take a step back and reassess.

“
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Reward good choices, maybe reward any behaviour with play. Play is super FUN and can reward your dog's good decisions more easily!





GAME 2

THE NOISE BOX

We like to use a cardboard box, an empty child's paddling pool, a laundry basket or any small space that would contain the noises. You could even use your bathtub!

Fill your noise box with:

- ✓ Carrier bags
- ✓ Noisy paper
- ✓ Bottles
(you could also fill them with things that rattle)
- ✓ Empty cans
- ✓ Bubble wrap
- ✓ Children's noisy toys
(Of course, only use objects that are safe for your dog)

You can decide the level of difficulty from looking at the dog in front of you. Remember that the dog in front of you is who you are training and they will dictate your training session and the difficulty level!

Allow your dog to explore the objects whilst scattering a small amount of food into the box. They get the food by exploring the box. This is going to hugely boost their confidence. If at any moment your dog is worried by the box go back a stage and try to develop their

confidence more gradually, maybe help them out a bit - this is an exercise to grow their confidence, not to worry them! Remember how to 'listen to your dog'. Vary the box and it's contents as often as you can and utilise all recycling and boxes that arrive at your house!

Write down your progress along the way and, where possible, video your sessions. Review your progress in 3 weeks time - we bet you will notice a real change!

This game is a super confidence builder in relation to novelty and noise. The key is small progression - you can't tackle everything at once; break the exercises into manageable bite size chunks and you will be onto a big winner.

The more you think outside the box about what to put in to the box and the more you allow your mind to make that leap, the easier it will become. Be brave, be optimistic, show us your GRIT as an owner. We can't wait to hear how you get on with this!

“ This game is a super confidence builder in relation to novelty and noise. The key is small progression - you can't tackle everything at once ”

GAME 3

REWARD ANYTHING

To follow on from our 'don't do' about correction, the very opposite is reward anything. This is a great game for building optimism and confidence in our dogs. It's pretty much what it says on the tin: reward anything, especially anything brave or inquisitive, when you can see your timid dog overcoming a fear or a concern. Anything that looks like optimism or interest – reward, reward and reward it.

It's a good job we don't use a dinner bowl anymore, right? So what we do is we sit down, we maybe have a new object with us or maybe just our dog and we literally reward anything they do that is different. This is a game for a pessimist, not a busy dog. So if your dog is busy and fast this is not the game for you. We want to work with the dogs who have closed off to trying here, this is the moment to reward them for anything, any trying, literally anything, do exactly what we say in the name!

And for a pessimistic dog, you can broaden this game out to some everyday challenges.

For example, your dog might stick his head into your shopping bags. How super awesome is that? How brave and confident and gritty is it to want to explore that bag. Reward it.

Or your dog might run off with your socks. You know what? That is amazing. Your dog wants to play, your dog wants to explore, your dog wants to engage with the world around. Reward it.

Of course, rewarding these behaviours is an ideal, gentle and optimistic way to distract from the behaviours that we don't want. Don't want your anxious dog to stick their head in your bag? That's fine, reward the bravery with a treat or a toy from one hand while you lift the bag out of harms way with the other. A little sleight of hand and a super step forward towards an optimistic dog.

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GAME 4

RECALL REIMAGINED

Let's add some new dimensions to this:

Haunted house recall: Play restrained recall through a narrow channel, maybe make it dark, add a slight obstruction or add some different surfaces on the ground.

Use additional novel items along the way so that your dog has to go past them or get through them. Make your dog's job a little harder but still super achievable! Use empty bottles, bubble wrap, cushions, paper filled bags. Creativity is KEY- remember, think outside the box!

Remember the rules we talked about for the noise box? Train the dog in front of you and mindfully manage the difficulty level to gently and gradually challenge your dog.

Hide and seek recall: Hide somewhere in the house, somewhere easy to start with, increasing the difficulty as your dog gets quicker and braver. You can add novel items to this one as well - reuse before you recycle - boxes, polystyrene blocks, bottles, noisy paper. Did we mention that the possibilities are endless?

Chase me recall: find some space and recall but zig zag, change direction and make it hard for your dog to get to you. This is so much fun. There's just one rule – don't fall over!!

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Manage the difficulty level to gently and gradually challenge your dog

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GAME 5

GO COMMANDO

We love to build many mini and suitable obstacle courses with multiple challenges: your dog can go over, around, under, through and on top of obstacles. You name it: we love it. Mix up easy options and more challenging ideas amongst the obstacles - remember to listen to your dog and always work with the dog in front of you on the day. Build the difficulty level gradually. Try not to force your dog over things as confidence can take time.

Use household items. Guess what, household recycling comes in super handy for this game too. You really can go crazy with this one, in fact we actively encourage you to! If you want to add a new dimension add wobbly objects or noisy surfaces into the equation. Remember to start with easier objects and add challenges gradually!

Lay out the course and all you have to do is either lure (let them follow food) or shape

(wait for them to offer you something) and you will see amazing confidence developing right in front of your eyes! If you're luring, keep it super slow and let them take time out if they need to. Not only is this an amazing confidence building activity, it is also great for body awareness.

We are super keen to see you and your confident dog have a ball here! Post some of your pictures on the NBN page for dog owners or our absoluteDogs page, we love to see your creativity on this one.

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GAME 6

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Teaching your dog to accept being touched is super important for so many reasons. For a dog that's wary of being touched or even if you just have a young dog who you want to get used to physical contact, we LOVE body contact play.

Can you play with your dog and then gently touch them in various places as you play? On a paw, a hand on their side or a firm but gentle stroke over the head.

Remember, gentle contact is more than enough and listening to your dog is really important.

We really like to video training and play sessions and this is a game where videoing the play would be massively helpful.

Watch the session back and look out for any subtle responses that might indicate wariness to being touched in a particular area – what a great record of your dog's developing confidence.

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GAME 7

NOVELTY SCATTER FEEDING

So this game is pretty simple and we simply love it! Every day your dog has a certain amount of food and we like to try to grow CALMNESS and confidence through timing our scatter feeding closely with outside distractions.

For example, when we know that a dog is in the next door garden but we want to let our dog out to explore the garden we can reinforce CALMNESS with a dog next door.

Scatter a good portion of your dog's dinner into the garden and then allow your dog out to hunt it out (remember to read our ditch

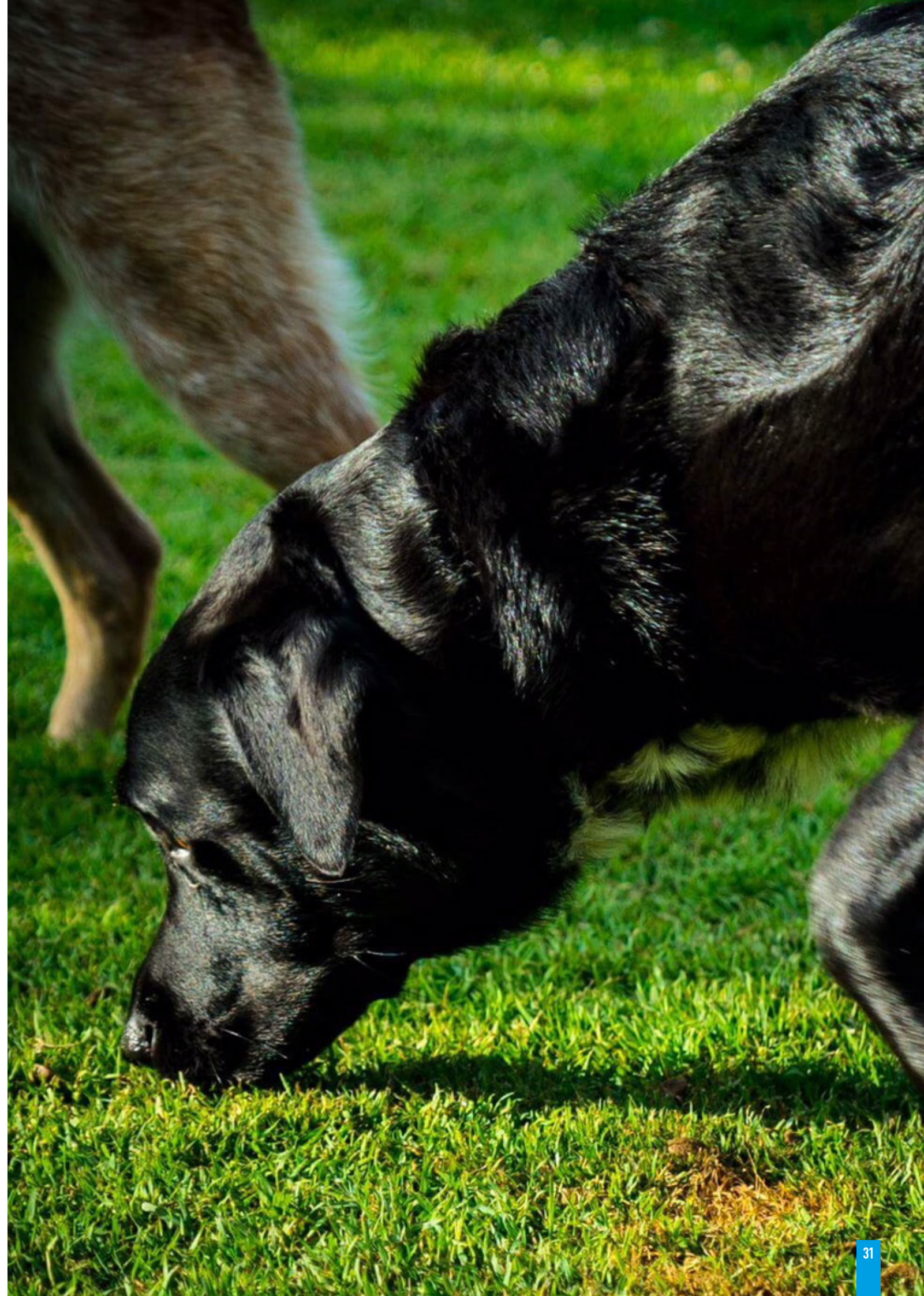
the food bowl eBook). Bring them back into the house or kitchen when they have finished, before they make any wrong decisions (like barking at the neighbours dog).

Have you noticed how many different concepts these games are building for your dog and how they overlap? Objects, surfaces, people, noises, novelty, calmness, confidence, GRIT!!!

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GAME 8

PICKING AWESOME PAIRINGS

This game is so straightforward yet it's one of the most powerful games in town.

Let's pick something your dog might usually respond to or 'notice': a neighbour in the vicinity or an unusual household sound, a person dressed as a clown or a large stuffed toy, a dark building or maybe a new person coming into a training class.

Take that last example, as the new person enters the building immediately feed your dog. Make an awesome pairing with the novelty of the new person. Do this in a cool, calm and protective way where we don't

over expose them but we also forewarn and reward our dogs for making some excellent decisions each and every day.

The big tip for this game is to use it before a 'problem' develops. Get used to pairing new and unusual things in the environment with something awesome.

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things in the environment with
something awesome**

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GAME 9

DMT: DISTRACT, MARK, TREAT

Now if you've seen our games before, then you will know all about DMT. See a distraction, use a calm marker and then deliver a treat. There are 3 stages for developing DMT. The second stage is to mark and reward when your dog notices the distraction; the third stage is to wait for your dog to notice the distraction and then orientate back to you before you mark and reward.

For the purposes of building optimism, confidence and grit, though, we want you to appreciate and we mean really appreciate, the first stage of this game.

When you start to play DMT, you mark and reward as soon as you see the distraction whether or not your dog has apparently noticed it

When you start to play DMT, you mark and reward as soon as you see the distraction whether or not your dog has apparently noticed it.

Chances are they know that the distraction is there, but you are pairing the early presence of something in your dog's environment with a positive experience. This first stage of DMT is a great confidence builder and you will find that your dog will begin to be braver and you can seamlessly move to stage 2.

Build your stages as you move through life, you may need to adjust to the setting you are in and this is one of our absolute favourite NBN confidence games: see the NBN game changer eBook for more ideas.



GAME 10

BOUNDARY GAMES

Okay, so this must be the most requested learning EVER – super cool Boundary Games!

We teach the dogs the VERY important, in fact, vital, job of staying on a boundary until released and we want to share with you the top tips and super tricks that will supercharge the learning and ensure the end result is exactly as we want it. We couldn't live without them and we are pretty

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A very important aspect of developing an arousal balance, an on/off switch, in training your dog is boundary games
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sure you won't be able to either once you get this journey started!

SO HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

A very important aspect of developing an arousal balance, an on/off switch, in training your dog is boundary games.

These are **games where your dog has to stay in a designated area until released** – this may be a mat, a crate, a tent, a platform, your household steps or even from room to room – you name it, we call it a boundary!

Boundary games have numerous benefits. They promote and develop impulse control. They can help to balance and level out arousal as needed and can even boost motivation and enhance your overall relationship with your dog.

They can also decrease arousal and help to promote calmness (yes boundaries can do both). On a practical level they will help with dogs who counter surf, they can help to prevent jumping up, help to improve recall and generally help to improve all basic behaviour and manners in many different places and habitats.

Build Optimism using boundaries:

have you checked out our boundaries eBook? Boundaries are super key for success and we love the endless fun you can have. It's all recorded in the boundaries game eBook - check the link out to make some awesome progress.



GAME 11

THE BOTTLE BATTLES

In previous lives we used to throw away our plastic bottles, then we started recycling them. Now we re-use before we recycle. How cool is that?

We like to pair the noise of bottles with additional food. So, as part of ditching the food bowl (see the ditch the bowl eBook) we use a lot of our food for doing bottle hunts and bottle noise games.

As well as using bottles in our noise box – with or without rattling contents, try these other bottle games. Drop a bottle and feed your dog; allow your dog to walk through bottles and scatter food amongst them to hunt out; move the bottles and see if your dog is still happy to eat; hang bottles up and encourage your dog to walk through –

gradually reducing the gap available for them to knock their way through; stand a bottle up and see if your dog will knock it down to get some food out of it; or let them crackle it, make noise with it and play with it.

Make sure to supervise; of course plastic bottles are not designed as dog toys but they make super good confidence builders!

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Drop a bottle and feed your dog; allow your dog to walk through bottles and scatter food amongst them to hunt out; move the bottles and see if your dog is still happy to eat

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GAME 12

PAWS UP

**Remember the multi purpose stool?
We like to teach paws up on almost
anything, even ourselves.**

You need to decide if this is appropriate for you and your dog but for us it's something that our dogs will only do on cue. It's a great way to add confidence when exploring the world and empowering our dogs!

Paws up on your feet or legs means you have an instant safe spot for your dog to interact with out and about. You decide the rules. Paws up and empower your dog!

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A great way to add confidence when exploring the world and empowering our dogs!

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GAME 13

THE CRAZY LADY

So we all love a crazy lady, what's not to love? This game might sound a little, well, crazy but we really know it works. You are going to regularly practice saying hello to no one.

Yes, you heard us correctly you are going to be saying hello to thin air whether in the house or out and about, say hello and feed your dog.

So what is the point of this game?

We explained before how dogs are born predicting and how being unpredictable really

helps them to be flexible, more chilled out and able to adjust.

Some dogs get over the top about new people whether they like them or they don't. Your dog is going to learn that you saying hi or hello (and you can change what you say as frequently as you like) is a fairly uneventful event that doesn't always end up with a new person for them to greet.

We play crazy lady whilst there is very little else going on in the environment and we watch carefully to see our dog's emotional response to each cue they hear. We want to grow confident optimists and this starts on basic food games like the crazy lady game when no one is around!

“

Some dogs get over the top about new people whether they like them or they don't. Your dog is going to learn that you saying hi or hello is a fairly uneventful event

”

GAME 14

VISITOR VICTORIES

Okay we like to set up people to come in or out of our house (whilst our dog is behind a stair gate, in a crate, separate room, puppy pen, dog room or on a boundary) and we will feed our dog. Imagine getting food just because there are visitors in the house.

Give them a long lasting kong, maybe frozen (see the ditch the bowl eBook) or a simple chew or be anywhere on the CALMNESS triad.

For our dogs confidence and let's be honest, our own comfort, we want a visitor to be a non-event!

The more your dog can be calm and collected with a visitor the happier we are and in turn the happier they are. Truly confidence at its best, it looks seamless and it looks easy!

Remember confidence is a muscle that needs to be flexed.

“
For our dogs confidence and let's be honest, our own comfort, we want a visitor to be a non-event!
”





GAME 15

LUGGAGE WITHOUT LIMIT

We do not want to hear about luggage limits at absoluteDogs. A suitcase really can provide you and your dogs with amazing fun and unlimited games. It can be used as a super focus to grow your dog's confidence in many ways. But firstly, what on earth are we talking about.....

Okay, so let's start with a big suitcase or whatever you have available. Can your dog get in and out happily? Use scatter feeding (thank goodness we've ditched the dinner bowl) and this suitcase will very quickly turn into a boundary for your hungry hound (see Boundaty Games eBook if you haven't already checked it out).

“ Confidence grows like a muscle! ”

Now that you know your dog is happy to jump in the suitcase you can start filling the suitcase with all sorts from carrier bags to noisy cans (like a transportable noise box).

The suitcase is just a portable container for FUN! You can also try to gently close the lid on your dog and let them pop it up again. As with all of our games, the key is softly, softly. Confidence grows like a muscle!

Gradually, your dog may get brave enough to lift the lid of the suitcase themselves before jumping in and searching out their reward. How cool would that be and what an awesome achievement for a once wary dog.

GAME 16

IT'S A KNOCKOUT

Okay, so one of the things we want to do to empower GRIT and bravery into our young dogs is to teach them that they have some level of control over things. Like what? I hear you cry. Like this. Take any object that you have at home maybe an old plastic bottle and your game is to try to encourage your dog to knock it over, yes, you heard us, knock it over!

“

**what we love about this game
is that we teach our dogs to actively
control noise and changes in
their environment**

”

So what we love about this game is that we teach our dogs to actively control noise and changes in their environment and we don't really mind how you encourage them to knock it over. **We can use:**

- ✓ Mimic
- ✓ Shaping
- ✓ Targeting
- ✓ Luring

or to be honest any way you want to teach it ... as long as it's kind and fun!

After some practice, pick a more difficult object. Maybe something bigger, noisier or generally a little different! Mix it up regularly and pick more new objects and have fun!





GAME 17

YOU CAN TOUCH THIS

So many dogs would choose to avoid being handled. For confidence and optimism choose to reward handling and choose to reward the opportunity to handle your dog regularly.

We don't make a huge deal of this we just calmly stroke and feed and add value to being stroked when our dogs are a little more settled and calm. For general confidence it's important that we encourage our dogs to be confident being handled whenever possible.

Choose to reward handling and choose to reward the opportunity to handle your dog regularly

Try:

- ✓ Gently stroking ears
- ✓ Lifting paws
- ✓ Checking pads
- ✓ Looking under their tail
- ✓ Cleaning their eyes
- ✓ Massaging their gums
- ✓ **Stroking** the length of their bodies and limbs including all the way to the end of their tail.

You really can go with whatever works for you and your dog and remember to guard the optimism and listen to your dog.

Only work where you and your dog are happy - stay safe and happy!

GAME 18

THE CONE

To play this game all you need is a plastic cone or cup that your dog can fit their muzzle in and their dinner!

In this game you reward your dog for any kind of interaction with the cone and then progressively become more specific about placing their nose in the cone. Once your dog has this behaviour down, you can switch the cone for all kinds of things.

The benefits of cone game:

- It builds **optimism**
- It promotes **confidence**
- It arms your dog with a crucial skill should they ever need to wear any of the following

1. Muzzle
2. Buster Collar
3. Head Collar
4. Harness



We have a video of this game to share with you.

<https://game.absolute-dogs.com/muzzle-love6fpimq5e>

”
It arms your dog with a crucial skill
”



GAME 19

TREASURE HUNT

We are sure you have all played this, it's a super great game for actively building confidence, resilience, problem solving, developing frustration tolerance, thinking in arousal and so much more.

It also encourages our dogs to use their noses, which really works their brain but can give them amazing focus and actually help to calm them too.

Sometimes we hide ourselves and other times toys and food – something really awesome; real treasure to your dog.

It's all down to you and your dog as to which level you want to play at. We love to see them winning so play at a level where they get a lot of success before you gradually increase the difficulty and the challenge. We love this game and we know you can have endless fun with treasure hunt!

“

**Sometimes we hide ourselves
and other times toys and food,
something really awesome;
real treasure to your dog**

”

GAME 20

ORIENTATION

We want our dogs to be super happy to come back to us; to think that we are the best thing in their environment. This is amazing for dogs who need to grow confidence – we are their safe zone, we are where they need to be when something scary is happening in the environment.

So, in this game, we want to reward our dogs just as soon as they look at us. Start in an easy environment and build up difficulty slowly, ever so slowly. You simply throw some food away from you, let your dog go and get it and as soon as they look back at you – like the instant their gaze orientates back to you – you mark and reward.

For more information on the Orientation Game please refer to our eBook 'NBN Game Changer'.

“
Play this everywhere, anywhere and as often as you can!
”

How to play:

1. Start this game in a very easy, low distraction environment where your dog is used to playing with you!
2. Throw a piece of your dog's dinner out (about one meter away)
3. After they finish eating it, of course, they are going to look back at you for more. At that moment of them orienting back to you, mark the movement with a

“YES” or a CLICK (if you use a clicker).

If they do not look back at you right away, just wait them out and mark the moment they do look back. You may have to start playing this game on lead first.

4. Follow the marker with the reward of throwing another piece of food out to continue the game.

5. Play this everywhere, anywhere and as often as you can!



GAME 21

GO SNIFF

Go sniff is an amazing game for getting your dog working with you and for using their natural instinct to sniff as a way of getting their focus on you.

Yep! We said that – use their desire to sniff as a way of getting focus on you.

Begin with marking when they sniff. When that nose goes down, mark and treat. And again, when that nose goes down, mark and treat. After a couple of super short sessions, begin to command the nose going down. So, the nose goes down, say 'go sniff', mark

and treat. Soon, telling your dog to sniff is a reason for them to look at you.

They get to sniff and yet they want to look at you: simple but true.

“

An amazing game for getting your dog working with you and for using their natural instinct to sniff as a way of getting their focus on you

”

GAME 22

FOOD CATCH

Food catch is a great way to get your dog to focus on you. So when you are out and about and there is something in the environment that might challenge them, you can play food catch and their eyes will be on YOU.

Catching can be really hard for some dogs, but even if they do struggle, you can still play this game. What we really want is a genuine attempt to catch. This real desire to catch ensures that there is focus on you. And focus on you is an amazing space for a dog who needs to grow their confidence.

Food catch is also a great game for dogs who aren't entirely comfortable with proximity to you. You can deliver great treats without getting in their space and they have to focus on you too. How great is that?

Start the food catch game somewhere super familiar and without distraction; inside your house is ideal. Keep your throw smooth and

gentle. Make it really easy and see how it goes. If your dog has difficulty with the game at first, try to make it even easier for them. We want some success so that they don't lose interest, so think about the colour and size of the treat. Use a light coloured treat in a dark space and a dark coloured treat in a light space. Make it a great treat too, so they really want it and they really try to catch. You can make it a little more challenging as they get better – they need to work for it a bit, but not too much, to make it more rewarding.

When you get that awesome focus inside the house, take it to the garden, outside the front door or in a quiet open space. Remember though, when you move to a new space, take the difficulty level back a bit to keep them working with you and so that they don't get frustrated and give up.

We love this game; it's so easy to start playing at a moments notice and is super rewarding for our dogs.

“If your dog has difficulty with the game at first, try to make it even easier for them. We want some success so that they don't lose interest





GAME 23

DOG ON TOUR

Stage 1:

We like to try to bring our young dogs almost EVERYWHERE with us but here is the important, in fact VITAL, information.

When they come anywhere and everywhere with us most of the time we are just allowing them to watch the world go by and we add very little pressure to the situation and at this stage we don't even interact with anything/ anyone unless we really think we need to.

We simply want to watch how they take the world in! We don't play all of the games until we see how they are responding. Slowly, slowly catchy monkey!

Stage 2:

A great example of how ditching the routine and flexibility can build on the games you know and improve confidence anywhere and everywhere.

We've all been there, we've practiced and practiced and practiced a behaviour in our kitchen at home. We meet some friends out and about or turn up to our training class.

We puff out our chest, all proud, knowing how much we've practiced and we ask for the behaviour. And it doesn't happen. Why? because we haven't generalized that behaviour in that environment.

Just like generalising trained behaviours we need to generalise confidence; and this game is just the thing.

Take an object – preferably something that's easy to move around – a wobble cushion is ideal. Work on a behaviour – for example, front paws on. Make it great fun, make it high value but, maybe, not too exciting. Take the wobble cushion or other object, on the road and every time you stop, ask for the behaviour.

Having a well-practiced and high value behaviour associated with an object gives your dog a positive experience in any environment. Supermarket car parks, service stations, garage forecourts, country fairs, dog shows, the list is endless. You might look a bit crazy but, it could be worse....did you see the Crazy Lady Game?

GAME 24

REST FOR SUCCESS...

Rest and recoup-reaction, we like to think of it as R&R time, is one of the least appreciated exercises out there - and it's so very vital for success with building confidence.

We know that confidence is like a muscle and just like all muscles it needs good rest time and we need to ensure that we facilitate that good rest.

We suggest:

- ✓ a calm space
- ✓ a crate
- ✓ a raised bed
- ✓ a puppy pen
- ✓ a spare bedroom
- ✓ a quiet kitchen
- ✓ a conservatory or off set room

Try to ensure that your dog has good rest time to allow that confidence muscle to grow. Remember to ensure that this happens each and every day.

It is our responsibility as owners and will allow our dogs to make good choices. Think about how much better you perform after a good rest, compared with being over tired. This is another area where listening to your dog pays off. Spot when they are making bad choices and wonder if, actually, they need some sleep to feel better and give you optimum results. Don't forget the CALMNESS triad!

“
Think about how much better you
perform after a good rest
”



OPTIMISM BOOSTER

Finally, we want to leave you with a final thought - building that super strong bond and relationship with your dog is in itself an OPTIMISM BOOSTER and the rewards have no limits. So we insist that you play games, that you have super fun and keep making progress and moving your learning journey forward.

Grow your vikings.....we like to think of our dogs as our vikings, our little warriors who can face the world and be real life ready.

“

Grow your vikings and have a lot of fun on the confidence journey!

”

We like to see them develop in their own individual ways so remember that when you are out there playing with your dogs, pick the games that suit them best at that moment. It's always changing and there is no right and wrong game, just the right game for the dog in front of you at the time!

Grow your vikings and have a lot of fun on the confidence journey!

We know that you've got this..... grit, bravery, desire, passion, optimum energy, rest and absoluteOptimism, its all in your grasp, at your finger tips, seize the opportunity.

**GROW YOUR VIKINGS AND
HAVE A LOT OF FUN ON THE
CONFIDENCE JOURNEY!**



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