



PLAYING WITH YOUR PILOT DOG

The purpose of this lecture is to explain the reasons why playing with your dog is important and to provide guidelines for playing with your Pilot Dog. This lesson includes the following:

- The role of play in your relationship with your dog
- Types of play that dogs enjoy
- Types of play that Pilot Dogs does not recommend
- Recommended toys

The Role of Play in Your Relationship with Your Dog

Play serves some very important functions for your dog:

- It allows your dog to release energy in an appropriate way. This is especially important any time your dog's work is limited, for example, during bad weather or when you are sick.
- It helps relieve stress; although Pilot Dogs enjoy their work, it can be stressful at times, and dogs like to have fun in their downtime just like people do.
- It helps to strengthen and maintain the bond between you and your dog, as your dog will see you as the source of something that he enjoys, as well as being a working partner.

Types of Play that Dogs Enjoy

Individual dogs vary in their preferred types of play; however, we can make some generalizations. Most dogs enjoy play that involves physical exercise, is interactive with you or with another dog, and allows them to use their mouths in some way. Some common approved ways to play with your dog include the following:

- Hold an approved toy in your hand while your dog chews on it.
- Hide and seek: have someone hold your dog while you leave the room and hide. Then call your dog to you and have the person release the dog.

- If you have another dog with a compatible play style, allow the two dogs to play together.

Types of Play that Pilot Dogs Does Not Recommend

There are some types of play that are common with pet dogs but not recommended for Pilot Dogs because they might have adverse effects on the dog's ability to behave appropriately.

- Tug of war. Dogs enjoy this game very much, but it should only be played with another dog. Tug of war is a game where the dog is challenging the other for dominance; if you played tug of war with your dog, you would need to win every game.
- Any game involving mouthing your hands or clothes. Dogs love to use their mouths. If they think you enjoy it in some situations, they may try it in other situations or with other people.
- Any game that causes your dog to become frantic or overstimulated. Moderate levels of energy are appropriate when playing with your dog, but if your dog is so excited that he cannot respond to your commands, the play needs to stop.
- Any type of game where your dog is chasing people. This type of play tends to get the dog overly excited and could also result in injuries.
- We do not recommend playing fetch with your dog. It is a game that will increase your dog's prey drive, and it teaches your dog to chase things that are moving quickly.
 - You can play a game called modified fetch, where you hold your dog's collar and throw an approved toy. Once the toy comes to a complete stop, you can let go of your dog's collar and let him retrieve his toy.

Recommended Toys

Pilot Dogs officially recommends only hard toys made by Nylabone and KONG. These toys are durable, and most dogs can be left alone with them safely in a crate or on a tie-down. You will be shown in class exactly which types of toys are recommended. Both Nylabone and KONG also make other toys that are not as durable and therefore not recommended.

- The most important concern with dog toys is safety.
 - Most dog toys are not very durable and can be chewed into pieces big enough for the dog to swallow whole. These pieces of toys can easily cause blockages in

the dog's digestive system, which can result in expensive surgery and even death in some cases.

- Rope toys, "edible" bones such as Greenies and dental chews, rawhides, animal bones, hooves, horns, pig ears, and toys with squeakers are all dangerous for this reason.
- A secondary concern with toys is appropriateness for a working dog.
 - If your dog is allowed to play with stuffed animals, he may not know the difference between the stuffed animals that are his toys and a child's stuffed animals that are on the floor in a friend's house you visit.
 - Never let your dog play with balls. Balls are VERY dangerous; they can get lodged behind the dog's back teeth and then cut off the dog's airway. Also, if he is allowed to chase balls, he may become overly excited when working in environments where people are playing with balls, such as school gyms and public tennis courts.
- If you follow Pilot Dogs' recommendations for appropriate toys, your dog will be safe while still being able to satisfy his need for play.