

WUBBA IS A VERB

Wubba is a verb in our house. We Wubba the dog every morning and sometimes several times a day. What on earth? A Wubba, the wonderful tailed toy from the Kong company, is Tika's, favorite toy. Tika is our very high energy dog, so finding games and activities that use up all that energy wisely is important. Games and activities are important for all dogs, of course, but when you have a dog that is high energy, a working breed or hunting breed, for example, it's even more important. The Wubba is a valuable tool for many dogs. For Tika, it can mean fetch, really high jumps, a reward for other activities, tug games and hide and seek. Every morning, she has the Wubba thrown for her for at least 15 minutes in a game of fetch, sometimes with some high jumps thrown in. We vary where we throw it to keep her mind working. That's important. Mindless play can be fun, but it doesn't wear out or work a dog like getting them to think does. Something as simple as throwing the Wubba over a jump, throwing it in the opposite direction once in awhile or tossing it when she doesn't see where it went so she has to hunt for it – all these get her mind to work. She's also not allowed to get away with just dropping it anywhere. We don't go pick it up. She's told she must bring it to us. She's been taught the word “bring” and a hand signal.

There are many games and activities you can find to keep your dog active. Some should be geared toward whatever activity you already do with your dog or their breed proclivities. But don't be afraid to think outside the box. Bloodhounds can fetch, Border Collies can track, Chihuahuas can do agility! Give them a chance to learn.

Hide and seek is a fun game that can be done with people (kids love to learn to do this with their dog) or with toys. Early in training, if there are kids in the home old enough to learn this, I have the adults teach the dog to go find the kids by name. At first, the kids “hide” in plain sight and they might have a treat for the dog. Gradually, the kids hide in harder to find places and the adult sends the dog to find Johnny or Patty or Sue. This little game came in handy when a client's young child wandered away during a picnic. He didn't go far, but was out of sight. They started yelling then thought of the hide and seek game and sent their mixed breed dog to find the little boy. He was only

out of sight behind a piece of playground equipment, and the dog found him quickly. I would never claim a client was making a search and rescue dog with this game, but it sure came in handy for that client! In any case, the kids are now a part of training and the dog is learning to respect them, too.

To play hide and seek with toys, the dog must recognize the toy by name or must see what toy is being hidden. At first, the toy gets “hidden” in plain sight, just like with the kids. Gradually make it harder and harder. This can be a great rainy day way to work the dogs or can be done almost anywhere. I hide my Standard Poodle, Boone's, soft toy by sticking it into a hole in the fence. It's high enough that he has to look hard or go by scent, but not so high that he can't reach it by standing up on his back legs. In the house, it might be in any room. He's also practicing down stays because I leave him in a down stay while I walk away to hide the toy.

Give your dog a job. Every morning, Boone goes out to get our paper, brings it into the house and puts it on a chair. In the evening, when my husband is working in his office, I give Boone a slip of paper saying “supper's ready” to take to my husband. My husband folds it differently (so I know he got it) and sends Boone back to me. When I put on my shoes in the morning, Boone fetches my shoe horn, which I leave on a shelf where he can easily reach it. When I'm finished, I leave it on the bench and then send Boone to get it for me so I can put it away. Your dog can get your slippers or shoes, pick up toys and put them away, pick up anything you've dropped and bring it to you, help pull laundry out of the dryer, learn to open doors, turn on or off light switches, find lost items (do you leave your keys places and can't find them?), etc. All these started with teaching him to retrieve and bring things to me and let me take them from his mouth, not just drop them. (Can't get your dog to retrieve? Call me for some extra lessons!)

Agility and rally equipment is a part of our dogs' lives. We don't compete, but it's fun, keeps their minds working and their bodies active. It's pretty easy to make basic agility and rally equipment from patterns available on the internet or to use what you have on hand. Traffic cones can make weaves, spirals, figure 8s and other patterns. Old car tires can be propped for a tire jump-through or laid on the ground for jumping on and around. A flat ladder (not a step-ladder) can be laid flat on the ground for walking through or

pieces of board or PVC can be laid in the same pattern as a ladder for walking through. A sturdy chair can be used to teach your dog to “table”. A plank can be laid over a brick for a wobble board or type of low teeter. A plank can be placed on cinder blocks for a dog walk. One of my favorites can be a rainy day activity, but I use it when I'm sorting laundry. I have extra laundry baskets placed in different spots in the room. I ask each dog to get into a different basket. Sometimes I leave them there in a sit for awhile. Sometimes I have them get in and out of various different baskets or jump from basket to basket. Sometimes I flip the basket over and have the bigger dogs jump over them and the little guy, Dudley, jump up and sit on it. Be sure your baskets are sturdy enough before trying this one.

Make sure all equipment you put together is sturdy enough for the dog(s) using it and won't hurt their paws with a splintery surface. Make sure the surface of the area is also appropriate. Dogs can slip and hurt themselves on slick surfaces and too much jumping on hard surfaces can eventually be damaging. Dogs under one year of age should not jump higher than their elbows and all jumping surfaces should be resilient to avoid damage to growing bones. Puppies can go up ramps, walk on different surfaces, walk through the ladder and through or over tires and walk on wobble boards.

If you have dogs that are not resource guarders or have just one dog, another hide and seek game for a rainy day can be done with small treats. This is kind of like an Easter egg hunt, only they get to eat the “eggs” as they find them. Put your dog(s) in a down stay or in another room while you hide tiny treats in various places through-out the house. You can also use part of their daily ration of kibble, especially if weight is an issue. Release the dog to go find the treats. You might want to follow along and encourage them toward a treat if they're having difficulty. Don't do this if food is an issue in your home and/or you have “resource guarding”. (Call me for help if this is an issue!)

NILIF is always a good game to use with dogs. This stands for “nothing in life is free”. Have some very tiny treats available in various places inside the house. Practice the obedience commands you've been learning. Call the dog to you, ask him or her to sit, give a tiny treat. Just one. Don't cheat! If your dog is seeking your attention, move away and call the dog; ask him or her to sit and give a tiny treat. Giving the dog the attention when they ask for it is

teaching them to ask for it in that way. Get them to earn the attention. Practice your obedience commands through-out the day in this manner. Of course, treats are not the only reward you could or should use. Verbal rewards and petting are not only acceptable, but preferred. You'll always have those available. Treats may not be readily at hand.

At least several times a week, go to another area of the house from where your dog is and call him or her to you. You can be out in the open or you can hide and get the dog to find you. Make the reunion very joyful and happy. "Come" should be a very happy command for your dog to receive. Now, here's a tough version of this one. At least a couple times a month, practice calling your dog in a voice heavy with emotion. You know – that voice that happens when your dog is running toward something that can harm him or her (across a street, toward a ravine) or that s/he might harm (a cat, rabbit, etc.). That deep, throaty or high-pitched screaming voice might send a sensible dog into flight, so it's really important that your dog recognize it as your "come-right-now-I-really-really-mean-it" voice. Alternatively, you could use a different word for this command. One of my clients uses "NOW!" for this command, whereas his recall command is "come". I know this doesn't sound like it fits into the game aspect of this article, but the dog doesn't know it isn't a game if you don't tell them. The main point of these games is to learn while having fun.

Now, go think outside the box, look around at things you have at hand, and come up with your own games and activities for you and your dog(s) ----- or use these. Make them your own. Have fun! Come to my The Public Dog Classes, where we practice many of these games. Call for more information. 480-586-5819

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