

THE BOX GAME

March 21, 2017

Training Tip Tuesday: The Box Game

Each week, I try to come up with a tip based on the questions I had all week. This week many of you came to me with dogs that ‘were driving you crazy!’ My advice to almost all of you was ‘work their brain!’. When your dog has more energy than you can physically burn (and maintain your sanity); getting them thinking is the key! That’s not to say exercise isn’t important; it certainly is! But if you find your crazy dog just seems crazier after a good romp about the yard; you’re right! Energy begets energy; the more they run, the more they want to!

“I run my dog every day before work; but when I come home he’s chewed everything/pulled things apart/dug up the yard/ etc” Remember; energy = energy! If you get your dog all amped up, then leave – they have no outlet for all the extra oomph they’re feeling! In an attempt to deal with it, they find ways to entertain themselves. Try this: get your dog some exercise, but allow a few minutes of down time before you leave; do something quiet that your dog enjoys. Perhaps a brush and light massage, short meditation session, just sit and talk... then give them something to occupy their time just before you leave (boredom toys, stuffed kong, etc...)

“My dog literally bounces off the walls/furniture/children/other dog...”. Sometimes dogs don’t understand the concept of ‘inside fun’. This is where your leash comes in handy. Did you know: leashes work inside too? Crazy, right? :P Hook your dog up, and keep him with you. Help educate him and explain the rules on ‘inside fun’.. No recreating WWE and launching yourself off the couch at the other dog. No seeing how high you can bounce off the chair. This is another place brain games comes in handy. If you give them something to think about; and think hard – they will use up some of that extra energy and be less inclined to show their crazy side!

“My dog runs away from everything! I can’t train or practice anything, because every little sound sets him off!”. Brain games help with confidence too. Setting up small problems that allows them to be super successful helps them learn to be more confident in themselves and their abilities. Kibble trails, nosework games, the box game, etc.. Training doesn’t have to be just about Sit and Stay! Learning to interact with the environment, learning to trust, and learning to try new things is huge!

The Box Game is something I’ve probably mentioned more than a few times; it’s a simple game, it doesn’t require any fancy equipment, and there are no training pre-requisites. Get yourself a box; it can be any size. Get a bowl of some yummy treats. Get your clicker (if you’re using one) and find a nice quiet place. Sit on the floor (or a chair), place the box on the ground, and call your dog in. If your dog looks at the box, click and reward! If he noses it, click and reward! He gets to do any behavior only once or twice, then he needs to try something new. You are NOT prompting him, or cueing him in any way. You are simply watching and waiting; rewarding every interaction with the box. As your dog starts to understand that the box has something to do with the game; you raise the bar. Now looking and touching it with his nose isn’t enough, he has to touch it with a paw. Now touching it with a paw isn’t enough, he has to put a foot in. etc..etc...etc... Remember; there are no wrong answers! As long as your

dog is trying to interact; praise and reward! (if you have a small box, reward your dog for putting a paw on top of it, etc... If you don't have any boxes; just find something interesting that your dog won't break)

What's the point? Well; you are asking your dog to think about a situation, to problem solve, to offer behaviors and try new things. You are working his brain in a big way! You are building up your relationship, and you are building his confidence by letting him be successful. At the end of the day, I don't care if my dog knows how to get in a box; I do care that if we encounter something new, he's not afraid of it, he's willing to interact with it, and he trusts me enough to try silly stuff, even if it doesn't make any sense. ("You got it buddy – put all 4 feet on that pool noodle!")

This is a great game for kids to play with dogs. Its also a great game if you don't have a lot of time; 15 minutes of challenging the box will do more than you think! Have fun, and feel free to post pics if you decide to try it!

Kod plays the box game...

<https://youtu.be/8JMR2cFc69k>