

# Tug of War Quick Notes

Adapted from San Francisco SPCA Tug of War

## Advantages

- Provides intensity, which stimulates your dogs mind and burns energy by tapping into predatory behavior.
- Predatory behavior is not the same as agonistic behavior and tug does not make your dog aggressive.
- Helps your dog learn jaw control
- Helps avoid behavioral issues due to under stimulation
- Control the game – control the dog

## Rules of Tug

1. **Dog Must "Out" On Command:** out-on-command is motivated initially with food rewards and later maintained with re-initiation of the game when the dog outs and a time-penalty or game-misconduct for failures to out
2. **Designated Toy and Compound Start Command:** the game is only played with one specific toy and never with anything else, and there is a specific initiation command
3. **No Uninvited Takes or Re-Takes:** dog must not grab before the initiation command or else face a time-penalty or game-misconduct
4. **Frequent "Obedience Breaks" in the Action:** these are "outs" followed by a bit of obedience (sit-down-tricks) followed by re-initiation as reward
5. **Jaw Prudence:** dog must never nick you or he faces a game-misconduct. Even if you deliberately

## Deep Dive into Rules

1. **Dog Must "Out" On Command:**
  - a. Practice the exchange dozens of times
  - b. The sequence is 1) your command to take 2) dog takes toy 3) your command to out 4) dog releases toy 5) reward with food 6) your command to re-take
  - c. Continue exchanges until dog outs for love of game, not treat reward
  - d. If the dog won't take toy, put in front of him and exchange that way
  - e. If the dog runs away with toy, don't let go next time
  - f. If the dog won't out, put treat on his nose

2. **Designated Toy and Compound Start Command:**
  - a. Designate one tug toy and never use a different toy
  - b. Don't leave that toy out and never allow the dog to play with it alone
  - c. Toy can double a retrieve object or hide and seek target
  - d. Start game with sit and take it
  
3. **No Uninvited Takes or Re-Takes:**
  - a. Continue to practice many outs and retakes
  - b. If the dog re-takes *before* you've invited him, give a No Reward Mark ('OH! Too bad!'), then a time-out and then an obedience break
  - c. If the dog makes the same mistake twice in a row, end the game
  
4. **Frequent "Obedience Breaks" in the Action:**
  - a. Alternate between rounds of tug and brief obedience breaks 1 to 4 commands
  - b. Improves impulse control and obedience when dog is excited
  - c. The dog will eventually see obedience as rewarding as the game!
  
5. **Jaw Prudence:**
  - a. If the dog touches your hand or any part of your body with his mouth screech ouch and end the game
  - b. Consistently practice and test out and obedience breaks and reinforce game misconduct penalties

## **Avoid Common Mistakes**

1. The owner allows the intensity of play to increase to the point where it may be physically dangerous. Avoid this by remembering to take obedience breaks.
  
2. The owner can no longer stop the dog from playing. Avoid by practicing obedience breaks and outs.
  
3. The owner allows the dog to initiate unsolicited play sessions. Avoid by sticking to the rules and only allowing the game to commence with the dog in a sit, the specified tug toy presented and the take it command given.