



## **Play: A Way to Gauge Stress**

From Dealing with the Bogeyman -Helping Fearful Reactive and Stressed Dogs  
Dr. Amy Cook, May, 2016 HAWS Seminar

### **What is play?**

- ❖ A social connection and silliness
- ❖ An enjoyable task for both you and your dog
- ❖ Learning Opportunity for both you and your dog
  - Impulse control
  - Mouth appropriateness
  - Leave it
  - Go out
  - Recall
  - Balance
  - Coordination
  - Focus
- ❖ Animal appropriate behavior
- ❖ Energy release with a person

### **What does play look like?**

- ❖ Physically relaxing (bendy body)
- ❖ Develops a personal connection
- ❖ Practice trust (give & take)
- ❖ Tension reduction
- ❖ Develop a language of what's fun
- ❖ It's FUN

### **What is the role of play in rehabilitation?**

- ❖ Relax the dog by preventing and countering physical tension
- ❖ Determine therapeutic threshold (one-step from relaxed and can engage in play)
- ❖ Measure of stress (indicator)

## How do we engage in play?

- ❖ Claw hands
- ❖ Play bow
- ❖ Predator/prey
- ❖ Flirt
- ❖ "Touch and Go"
- ❖ Driven by dog - you "turn off" if your dog looks away, turns away, or disengages

## What are the Don'ts of play?

- ❖ Only use toys, tugs, or food as a bootstrap to building personal play because using them may mask your dog's threshold and ramp up arousal.
  - Use play with toys, tugs, or food but stop intermittently and engage in person to person-to-dog play to check their stress level *especially* if something changes in the environment.

- ❖ Do NOT try to ramp up

### **boot-strap**

***/' bōōt , strap/***

*verb*

1. get (oneself or something) into or out of a situation using existing resources.

energy during play.

- It does not allow your dog to drive play.
- It may mask stress.
- ❖ Food is not an earned treat during play - it is a toy
  - Use it as prey
  - Hide it between knees
  - Hold up higher
  - Move it around
- ❖ 3 second rule - only pet your dog for 3 seconds, stop, hands off, then reengage in play
- ❖ Play once or twice daily for 2-3 minutes each time (what does each session look like for your dog?)

## What should your dog's energy level be?



- ❖ Stay in your dog's energy range. If they play at a "2", stay in the 1-3 range.
- ❖ Do not try to raise your dog's energy level quickly, it may quickly spiral into arousal.
- ❖ If dog goes above their range, stop, playing and bring your energy level down before reengaging.