



TUG OR NOT TO TUG?

"IT IS HOW YOU PLAY THE GAME"

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Some Boxer owners feel that the tug of war game has the potential to make the dogs aggressive, dominant or could ruin their bite. Most Boxers naturally have a tugging instinct bred into their genetics. They were bred long ago for bull baiting and have immense power in their jaws. Playing tug of war is a healthy way to let them have fun, exercise and to naturally display their predatory nature. Of the 52 Boxer owners/breeders that I posed this question to, only ONE person thought that tugging could perhaps cause jaw/bite damage.

Playing tug of war with your Boxer is actually a great way to exercise your dog both physically and mentally. Barbara Potter from New Hampshire believes that tugging builds confidence and is a great stress reliever for conformation and obedience competitions. She enjoys the direct interaction with her dog vs. having him chase a Frisbee or tennis ball. However, she specifies that rules must be followed to keep things from going overboard. Jill Hootman of Tealcrest Boxers uses tug games for her dogs, especially if they are not food motivated.

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Rene Bayse is a top Boxer performance handler/breeder who shows her dogs in 4 venues - obedience, tracking,



the ring. Her rules are strict and she incorporates them in her daily training routines in order to keep her dogs from being bored and leaves the game with them wanting more. The dogs rarely have aggression issues with her during play, as she ends the game on her terms. Joanne Klauer of Integra Boxers in Canada teaches her baby puppies with soft tugs made out of rabbit fur, cowhides or suede material. She begins with light tugging when they are young and teething. She switches to larger toys as they mature. Her dogs are taught that the toy is "hers," and she is the one who initiates and ends the game.

formal ring type presentation and start using the "give" command. Their motivation is never lost. In training, my tug toy is tucked in my back waist band so I can break, release and play to mark the correct healing position or agility jumps taken. The dog's attention is on ME and nowhere else. One of my best quotes has been "the death of an obedience Boxer is boredom." This is one way I can keep them focused and show them that I am in control. It also teaches them how to calm down in between plays and how to earn their rewards.

***"Bottom line,
both dog
and handler***

HAVE FUN!!!!!!"

schutzhund and agility! She believes that tugging sets the foundation for her dog's drive and motivation both in and out of the ring. Playing tug allows Rene to warm up her dog and provides handler and dog focus before she competes. She enjoys the fact that the dog is not totally dependent on food rewards and she can take their drive from play immediately into

Personally, I use the game for my foundation in retrieve work with young puppies. They learn to chase the thrown tug toy and come directly back to me for play and another throw. I then switch to a dumbbell and slowly shape them into a





Boxer "A-List" Toys

Tug toys can be as simple as a tennis ball knotted in an old athletic sock or a high-end commercial hard rubber/rope toy. The best toys are rugged and flexible. They also need to have a comfortable handle to keep your hand away from the dog's mouth. Stay away from stuffed toys. They only last a few minutes in my house and are a mess to clean up after they are de-gutted. Schutzhund trainers start out young puppies with rags and jute bumpers to build confidence and drive as early as 5 to 6 weeks old. They feel this is a must for their foundation training.

Game Rules

1 You start the game and finish only on your terms.

2. Teach your Boxer the release or "out" command. The game ceases if the command is not obeyed. This proves valuable in other applications such as when your dog picks up something of which you do not approve. Have treats ready to give in exchange for the release.

3. If your dog makes contact with you by jumping or biting, the game ends. Growling is normal, but keep your dog from becoming overly excited. Use your release command and start over after a 30 second break or once your dog is relaxed. You can incorporate sit

and stay commands here also. Reward him by starting the tug game again.

4. Keep your tug toy out of sight when not in use. Only use it for your special play sessions. This way the toy will remain a hot and excitable item in the dog's mind.

5. Never let tugging go overboard. Stop immediately and walk away. It is OK to switch up who wins! This is where they can build their confidence and run around and have fun!

6. Never let your dog swing off the ground with the toy. Use common sense for safety.

7. If your Boxers play tug with each other, stop them when things start to escalate beyond a friendly level.

Stop by your local pet store and see the myriad of available toys. You will notice that most of them are tug related. Purchase a couple and begin having fun!



"Train your dog as if it is the last day you spend with him". TLH

