

4 Puppy and Dog Training Games for Acquired Bite Inhibition

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped By Dog. I am Susan Garrett, and today is a super exciting day. Because today I'm going to teach you four games that you can play with your puppy or dog on this podcast. Like I'm teaching it, even though most of you aren't going to be able to see me. However, if you would like to watch what I'm doing, just jump over to my YouTube channel, [YouTube/DogsThat](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDogsThat), and you're going to be able to get a more visual representation of what I'm going to teach. I'm also going to talk about toy selection and how that may be increasing or decreasing the amount of times you puppy owners are getting bit. I'm going to share with you how you can redirect if a puppy is in the midst of playing tug with you, they suddenly just bite your hand and think that that's okay.

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I'll also talk about why some Veterinarians suggest don't play tug with your puppy. But first I need to give this little warning. Most dogs will never bite with the intention of hurting somebody unless they are afraid. That fear may stem from the fact that they're hurt, may stem from the fact that they are cornered, or they just might be a nervous and timid dog. But most normal dogs are not going to bite.

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You don't necessarily know if your dog is one of those abnormals. Very few dogs might bite more ferociously. And if you have a dog that has bit you or a puppy that has bit you several times seriously, then I would seek out the help of a professional Veterinary Behaviorist. Somebody who specializes in behavior, not just a dog trainer.

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I understand a lot about dog training, but I am not a behaviorist. So, seek out the help of a professional if you have a dog that is biting and drawing blood or a puppy who is continuously biting and drawing blood. All right. So, I want to make sure, make it perfectly clear. You can't dog train a brain abnormality, but potentially better living through pharmaceuticals, you might be able to still help that dog. And behavior modification and the support of mind altering pharmaceuticals.

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Okay. Got that out of the way. Let's jump right into the first game. Yeah, why would I want to teach games? Everything I teach a dog I teach in the form of game. I have many online courses and all they are, are games with specific outcomes.

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So [Recallers](#) builds a better relationship, teaches a dog to come when called, teaches a many other behaviors on the way. I'm just teaching my students one game with an outcome. 40 games and you get amazing behavior. [Home School the Dog](#) has 12 games in there. And all my agility, dog agility related courses [[Handling360](#) and [Agility Nation](#)], everything I teach, I teach through games.



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This is one of the fundamental ones. And this first one is just called the “Search Game”. I use the word “search”, you can use any word you want. It's a game that teaches your dog they now have permission to eat food off the floor. And you're going to say, Susan, I don't want my dog to just go grabbing food. Yeah, that's the point. They learn, they're only allowed to go grab for food when you give them this cue. A lot of layers of learning with dogs. There is no magic pixie dust. But this is a great start. And you're going to see by the end of this, how these games blend together. And actually, for you puppy owners, build on [Episode 17 of Shaped by Dog](#) and help teach a puppy not to bite humans.

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The first game “Search”. All that you need to do have your dog on leash. Have really attractive treats. Maybe in a pocket or in a, if you have a little pouch, you're going to take one in your hand and just walk around, when the dog isn't like staring at you, looking for, Oh my gosh, you've got food. What you're going to do is you're going to say a word which is going to be meaningless at first, right?

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I used the word “search”. You can use the word, “find it”, anything that means you now can go grab this cookie. You're going to say the word search and then drop the cookie in front of the dog. So, they don't have to look too far. They eat it, you walk around a little bit more, say the word search, drop a cookie in front of them.

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You can do this on your walk. When you go walking in the morning. Dogs on leash, say the word search. You're going to need to slow down though. Yeah. Slow your walk down at a moment when you're going to play the search game. Super simple. After you've played two or three sessions of this, you're going to add the second game to this, and it's called the “Collar Grab Game”.

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What you're going to do is you're going to say the word search, throw the cookie out. When the dog comes back, grab the collar and give them another cookie. That's all the collar grab is. We need to condition the dog to the fact that when my hand comes towards you, stretch up your neck, don't bite it. Stretch up your neck and produce it for me to grab your collar. And you should be doing this dozens of times around the house. It doesn't always have to follow the search game, but I like to start it because the expectation of the dog with the search game is, they're going to get a cookie.

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So, the first time you might play the collar grab game, it might be when the dog comes back from playing the search game. But then you can go off and just grab the collar, give a cookie. Anytime you're going to give your dog a treat around the house, always, always start with a collar grab. Why? Because we're building value. A transfer of value we are getting between my reaching for your collar and the cookie coming out.

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But in order to get that, if you remember our episode on teaching that transfer value. The food can't come first. So, you can't have the cookie coming towards your dog's face and then grab the collar. You grab the collar and then give a cookie. All right. So, we've got two games. You can play them individually, or you can build them together. And now we're going to build the third game.



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Some people call this tug of war. Some people call it just tug. I call it "Intentional Tug". It's intentional tug because we're going somewhere with this. We are going to create an amazing outcome. Now, why would some veterinarians tell their clients, don't play tug with your dog? The reason is that if you aren't intentionally playing tug it could lead to kids getting bit. Because puppies get overexcited, they drop the toy and go and bite at the little hands or at the little tummy or at whatever's closest to them when they get in their excited state. Remember episode 17, I said that could be one of the things that leads towards biting. However, tugging is a great game to get that dog gradually in a more excited state and still learn to play by your rules. It's brilliant.

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There's four important point parts to the game of tug. And when you play with rules that tells the dog, when the game is over, then you can end it very, very quickly. And we're also teaching that puppy, when you have something in your mouth that I don't want you to have, when you hear a word, then spit that out. Okay. So, lot of great things can be taught to a dog by tugging.

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First thing you're going to do is be considerate of what toy you're playing with. So, before you start playing tug, decide what's that toy look like. Now, most people make the mistake of choosing a toy that's way too small. And so, they end up with their hand really close to the dog's face. Now I can do that with my adult mature dogs, because we've learned all these rules. I know they're not going to bite my hand. But when you're starting with a puppy, even a puppy doesn't want to play with a tug, it's a good thing to do to get your hand away from that puppy's face. Number one, decreases the chance of them biting you. Number two, decreases the intimidation from the puppy.

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Like that hand is super close and I'm not entirely comfortable with it. So, a long toy. Rule of thumb, with a puppy, it should be three to four times the body length of that puppy. A meter long, isn't a bad length to play tug with a puppy. Number two, when you're choosing a toy, you ideally want some sort of an attractor at the end of a toy. So, the attractor could be something that dangles that the puppy sees visually and says, Oh, look, there's something interesting on the end of this, there's dangly pieces of fluff and I'm really attracted to that. Or it could be something that squeaks, makes noises. It might be a squeaker.

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It might be, sometimes toys have like a crinkling sound to them. So that noise, they like that sound of that in their mouth. So that would be a good thing to have at the end of the toy. And some dogs are attracted things that smell. So, a toy that is maybe made with a fleece or a fur. The smell could be like leather or, um, this one is made with discarded old coats, people's coats that they didn't want.

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It could be the handle. Some puppies just want to play with the handle, because it smells like your hand. In that case, you're going to have to take the other end. The attractor could be something soft, like fleece or something that they like, like a ball. Some dogs like balls and squishy balls or hard balls. And think of the thickness of the toy. I love playing with braided fleece. And you know, if you're sitting at home looking at a bunch of old socks, just braid some socks together, and you've got yourself a puppy toy. You don't have to keep tying knots to get it long enough, but that's an easy one right there.



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I personally love toys that have a bungee built in, so that it's easy on me and easy on the puppy's body as they get growing, they could get heavy. So, I like a toy with a bungee. Some puppies like really thin material in their mouth. So, if you have a toy that has an area that's thin, we don't know, you can go to all this work and get something that's super attractive and they're still going to go for your hands. We're going to fix that though. Okay. So now we've got a toy that your puppy is attracted to.

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First step of tug, of intentional tug is the tease phase. What we're going to do is make sure that our puppy is engaged with us. So, smack the toy on the ground and when the puppy runs towards it, lift it up, transfer to your other hand, smack it over here. You might do that two or three times, but do not over tease. You're going to lose interest. So, no more than two or three times, eventually it could just be one T, smack it, move it, hit it, let them have it. Smack it on the ground, move it, smack it. That's the tease phase.

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Now we're moving into the tug phase. We're going to let them get that tuggy and you're going to back it away from them and snake it. Snake it like a snake moving S, snake it in front of them so that they can grab it. What are the biggest mistakes people make when they're teaching their dog to tug is they go at them. Remember confidence and comfort. This is a little intimidating, don't get at my face. Back away, they are more likely going to grab that.

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Alright, so now we've got a game of tug going. Everything's happy. Do not go on for too long. Remember I told you that some puppies get over aroused. So, I might play that game of tug for maybe 15 seconds. 15 seconds? Susan, that doesn't seem like too long. It's an intentional game of tug to teach a lesson. In order to teach a lesson, we have to move through each phase very, very quickly. So, I decided my 15 seconds is up, I'm going to move to the third phase of tug, which is freeze. So, he had tease, tug and freeze.

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Freeze is wherever I am, I'm just holding position. Just stopping. Some puppies, just that the action of you stopping will drop the toy and look at you like, what what's going on? Why did you stop? I don't understand. And if that happened instantly, you're going to praise them and give them a cookie, "good job". Because the freeze caused them to drop the toy.

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Now, a lot of puppies aren't going to drop the toy. So, you're going to freeze for just, one, two, now produce a really good cookie, really like a big chunk of meat. Put it on their nose. And they're going to go, wow, they're going to take the cookie. While they're eating, you are taking the toy, grabbing it up in your hand and kind of repositioning it near your body.

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So, they've now forgotten about it. Remember, your puppy is on leash during all of this, so they're not running off and saying, Oh, there's something over here, there's something over there. They're on leash during all of this. So now the puppy's eaten, they might look around for the toy. They might jump up at the toy.



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You're going to wait until they settle and do nothing. And then you're going to go back to the tease phase. Tease, tug, freeze, reward, regroup, hide that toy and then replay. Those are the stages you're going to go through. The mistake some people make when they play this game is, they forget the freeze. They go from tug to here's a cookie on your nose, and now you're going to give it to me. We need the freeze. It is the built-in trigger that tells the dog, I'm about to ask you for that toy. So, if you don't have the freeze, then what you're building in is a barter. It's not a release.

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When you want to get that toy out, your puppy is going to go, well what do you got for me? We don't want that. We want to build in the release. So, what's going to happen is when the puppy starts dropping routinely on the freeze, because they predict you are then going to get that cookie, now we're going to add a word before the freeze. So, it's going to look like this, tease, tug, and while you're tugging, you're going to give your word, "thank you" is a great word. That means I would like you to give me that toy back right now. So, you say thank you and then you freeze. And then you bring out the cookie. Do you see how freeze was a trigger that the cookie is going to come by saying your word while you're still tugging? It's predicting that the freeze is coming, which predicts that the cookie's coming. How magical is that, right?

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Exciting. You've got a dog who started to understand things. It's intentional. Now what about in the midst of all this, the dog redirects and grabs, the puppy grabs your arm or in the midst of all this or grabs your clothing? Same thing. Go back to the protocol that I mentioned in [Episode 17](#), you're going to do the exact same thing.

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You're going to freeze. You're going to wait. Now, if you've got a puppy that when you're freezing, they're like I got your clothing and I'm okay and life is grand. Remember the game we taught at the beginning of this program, the collar grab game. Now, all that you're going to do is gently grab the puppy's collar and move them closer.

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If the puppy is tugging on something. So, let's say the puppy has got your pant leg and they're tugging. All that you do is grab the collar and move them closer. And what that does is decreases, give slack between the puppy's mouth and your pant leg. And eventually now the game is boring, so they're going to drop it and go, Oh, okay. So now you can redirect that puppy back to your game of tug. But you need to, this is so important, you can't just grab the collar. If you haven't loaded up with dozens of sessions of collar grab game. The collar grab game, it's what builds the permission for you to be allowed to interrupt your puppy grabbing your pant leg and the freezing isn't working.

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So, remember you don't just grab the collar immediately. You freeze, you stop talking. Most puppies are going to go, what, Oh, this isn't fun. And if they go outside, I got your pant leg, I'm fine. Then you grab their collar, gently move your leg towards their collar. You are not pulling up on the collar. The collar grab is not meant to intimidate, cause pain and get them to choke them out so they give you your pant leg back. Absolutely not. You are grabbing the collar in order to create, slack in the pant leg so the puppy can no longer get reinforcement from tugging with your pant leg. That's it.



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All right. Super important you get those mechanics right. All that we're doing is interrupting and decreasing the reinforcement value that the puppy's getting when they grab your pant leg. Now, if in the midst of play, they redirect and grab your hand, you just go right back to the bite protocol that we taught in episode number 17 and work through that protocol. It's exactly the same thing. Now the final game is a test.

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You are not going to play this game until you've played the tug game for at least two weeks. This final game is how is it taste. I still play this with my dogs. Because they're like, you're weird. I don't know why you're doing this. This is weird. All that you do for the "How's It Taste", is you may be playing a game with your puppy, you might be just chilling. You put your hand in their mouth, how's it taste. Now, some puppies are going to chomp and bite on it. You're going to know is your bite inhibition protocol working? My goal is, is for the puppy to go, "That's weird. Why did, w w why did you put your, why did you put your hand in my mouth? You're weird.

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That's what I want. Because remember our goal, if you, from episode 17, our goal with puppies is to get them to go, "oops, my bad". If you touch your mouth on my hand, are you showing me the oops, your bad stage. Great. What if I put my hand in your mouth, will you still go to oops, my bad? That's what I'm looking for.

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So, if you have a puppy who still in stage four, when you're evaluating how your puppy is biting, then you don't want to start playing the how's it taste game, right. Now, for those of you who are following on my recommendation, you will be seeing a decrease in the amount of biting that your puppy is showing you.

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Here's what I've got for you. I have got a journal. If you go to ShapedByDog.com/18, that's today's episode, you will find there the transcripts, like you always do on any episode of Shaped By Dog. But you're also going to find this journal.

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It's a journal that my team's put together that will help you by showing you how you can record keep this, that it will help you decrease the amount of biting you are going to see. All you're going to be doing is keeping track of how many times a day and the intensity of the bite. All right. So, go to ShapedByDog.com/18, just 18, a one and an eight.

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Boom. That'll take you to this episode's show notes and all kinds of great links there. You should be checking out the show notes in every episode. All kinds of magic happen in those show notes. Uh, you know what, it's a magical place to be.

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That's it for today, you learned four brand new games. You learned how to minimize your dogs biting you by showing them how appropriate is to tug on a toy and what to do when you redirect.





Episode: #18

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And now when your Veterinarian says, “you probably shouldn't tug with your puppy”, you can say, “hey, I got this great lesson plan”. You can share Shaped By Dog with your other clients, they're going to learn how intentional tug is different than just mindless tug. Intentional tug teaches lessons and decreases that biting.

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I would love to hear from you, please, please, please send me a review. Wherever you're listening or watching this podcast. If you happen to be watching on YouTube. Let me know what you're thinking of the podcasts. Give me some inspiration on what you'd like to hear from me next. That's it for today. We'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 17: Help! How do I STOP Puppy Biting?!](#)

[DogsThat YouTube](#)

[Podcast Episode 11: The Power of Permission in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 2: Reinforcement](#)

[Download Your “Acquired Puppy Biting Journal”](#)



4 Puppy and Dog Training Games for Acquired Bite Inhibition

About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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