

10 Engaging Chase Games To Increase Your Picky Eater Dog's Food Drive

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Effective, efficient, and kind dog training involves the [transfer of value](#). The thing you would like your dog to learn how to do, they are game to participate in it because of the reinforcement they earn for being part of your game.

And so, for some of you whose dogs aren't super keen on any real reinforcement, today is for you. Because today I'm going to share with you 10 games that you can play with your dog to increase the value of the reinforcement you use in training.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And if you think about reinforcement in the way that we use it in our training programs, there's three categories. There's food, there's toys, and there's activities. And I can use any one of those three things to reinforce any behavior that I want my dog to have value for.

For example, if I want my dog [to walk beside me](#) and my dog would prefer to chase the other dogs, once I get like one step of walking beside me, I can release my dog so that they can chase the other dog. That's an activity that I use to reinforce a behavior I like.

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Now, it's going to take a long time to train your dog to do anything using an activity that takes a long time for the dog to process to reinforce just a moment of time in a response that you like. Therefore, things like toys and food are really more efficient when you're thinking of training in the long game.

But if you have a dog who has somehow either been reinforced for, or just never really was keen on food, then training becomes a real burden for you. And so, I started this series back in Shaped by Dog [episode number 269](#), where I talked about things that you can do to help overcome what you may be doing, or maybe environmentally reinforcing your dog for turning down treats.

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And then in our last [episode number 271](#), I gave you some guidelines on how to set your training up. Well, today I'm going to share one category of games that I promise you will boost your dog's keenness for food. Now I break the games that I'm going to share with you into two categories.

The first one is Games of Chase. Think about presenting your dog a piece of food. You just go, "Yeah, that was good. Here you go." It gives you a kind of like the Winnie the Pooh, Eeyore kind of vibe, right? Eeyore going, "Yeah.... Here's your cookie...."

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And the way that we're going to present the food reinforcement to your dog today is via a chase. So, think of Tigger reinforcing your dog. It's excitement, it's activity.

It's more likely to change your dog's physiology and get them excited about wanting that piece of food. So, I'm going to share with you 10 games today that are going to be super easy for you to follow along.



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And if you're listening to this podcast, once you've finished it, you might want to jump over to YouTube where you can see actual demonstrations of each and every game that I'm going to share today. I'm going to start it out by reminding you, there is a possibility that the reason your dog is not keen on food is a physical one. They may be in pain. It could be a joint pain. It could be GI pain. So, make sure that you've ruled this out before you attempt to dog train.

Because you can't dog train away pain. Deal with that first and then we help the recovering dog to find joy in their training. And we start by elevating the value of food to the dog. Now you might say, "Oh Susan, my dog already likes food, and you know, I can just go—." These games you can use to elevate the value of a toy.

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So, you can just slide in what it is that you would like your dog to be more, keen on. Maybe your dog loves [tennis balls](#), but you would love for that dog to love [a tug toy](#). You can use some of the strategies that I'm going to be sharing in the next two episodes, the games, you can use them to grow that value.

As a matter of fact, at the end of today's episode, I'm going to share with you how you can download an eBook that previously I wrote for my Recallers community, but we're now sharing it with our newsletter subscribers. And I want anybody listening to this podcast to be part of that community. So, at the end of today, I'm going to share with you how you can become a newsletter subscriber in order for us to send you a copy of this eBook.

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And it's all about building the motivational value of a toy, but there's some key things in there that will help with the motivational value of your food reward. So, let's start right off with Chase Games. Chase Games that are going to bump your dog's value for food. Think about if you just hand your dog a food versus the food's attached to a rabbit and the dog gets to chase the rabbit for that food.

Which one do you think the dog's more likely to want as a delivery process? Definitely let's chase the rabbit for the food. But chasing rabbits is not very kind so we're not going to do that today. We're going to turn your dog's food delivery into games that's kind of like chasing a rabbit. And it begins with game number one, I call '*Cookie Bowling*.'

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Now, in order to be really effective with this, you want to play it on a smooth flat surface. Like a tile floor is ideal unless your dog's a little too frantic and there's a worry that they might wipe out. So, something smooth. You can even play it outside on concrete if you have it, but outside on gravel, probably not a good idea because you're not going to be able to bowl the cookie as the name implies. We want to toss the cookie underhand. So, it comes out of your hand near the ground, and it just rolls in front of the dog.

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So, having a smooth surface to bowl on is definitely an advantage. The second advantage is having a food reward that is round. So, you can buy some round treats for your dog, but you can also make them. So, start with something that is a size appropriate for your dog because we don't want to fill them up. But we want it big enough that the dog is enticed to want to chase. So, all that you do is you take the dog by the harness or by the collar.



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You're going to pull them back a little bit, get them excited, show them the cookie, say "ready, steady," or words that encourage them, and then toss the cookie right under their nose. Not too far away. The first toss is no more than your dog's body length away.

And you're going to toss it and tell the dog "Search." Once that you do that, you're going to get up and run in the opposite direction. So, the dog will eat the cookie and then have to come and chase you. And guess what happens when they chase you down? They get a higher value cookie.

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"Susan, I told you my dog doesn't like food. So, why would they chase the cookie?" Aha! You want to refer back to episode number 271 because that's where I talked about how to evaluate food, create high value food, make sure you have a hierarchy of food. And we're going to start food bowling with the highest value food that your dog has, and they will chase it.

It's only a short distance. We are going to gradually increase that distance so you can cookie bowl, turn and run, watching your dog as they pick it up. And then you're going to be quiet. You're going to resist the urge to cheerlead.

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Watch the dog pick up the food. When they turn, they see you running, and when they catch you up, you're going to give them a high value reward and give them a lot of celebration. When you run away from the dog, when you throw the cookie, you don't want to run too hard. You don't want to run too fast.

Remember, a rabbit that's too far from the dog, the dog's not going to want to chase. So maybe run on the spot until the dog picks up the cookie and then pretend to run a couple of steps. The dog doesn't have very far to go, they catch you up, they get another higher value cookie. Everything is amazing. So that is game number one, Cookie Bowling.

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Game number two, we now have a dog who we know will be keen to chase that cookie. We're going to go into a corner. So, it's '*Cookie Bowling into a Corner.*' We want to get at least, at least six to 10 body lengths away from your dog before we start this.

By throwing it in the corner, we can control how that dog turns and therefore we're going to be able to run further away. Because we're able to go a larger distance away, because we're throwing into a corner, because the corner's controlling the turn, you can run as soon as the dog picks up the cookie and run as fast as you can.

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Keeping a connection with your dog. Don't just turn and ignore them. Keeping that connection as you run away. But this time you'll probably be able to get further away and get that dog to move faster. All of that changing the dog's physiology is helping to build more value for the food itself.

And now we're going to go to game number three, which is really closely related to the first two games. In this one, it's *Cookie Banking*. And think about a pinball machine.

What we want to do is throw the cookie towards the corner, but have it hit maybe a stack of books that change the trajectory, (easy for you to say, Susan), change the trajectory of that cookie. So, as the dogs heading for the book stack or whatever you're going to use to redirect the cookie.



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They suddenly have to go off in the other direction. You are not going to run and again until the dog gets the cookie, and then you're going to have a great game of chase ending up with a higher value reward.

Now, if in the middle of either of these first three games, the dog says, "Hey, that's a good cookie that I'm chasing. But the better one is actually when I catch you up." and they just won't chase the cookie that you're bowling, then you need to change the value.

Your dog is always telling you where the value is. So, do a few games where the highest value reward gets bowled, and a slightly lower value reward given to the dog when they catch you up.

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Okay, game number four, you can incorporate it into the first three games, but it's *Cookies on the Fly*. And here's the thing. When I see people, especially in the sport of dog agility, they want to use food to reward their dogs.

They often, if I say run, let your dog catch you, when the dog catches them, they stop. They dig in their pockets, they get out a cookie, and then all that energy of the dog chasing and being excited goes right into the toilet as they wait for you to give them that cookie.

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And so, our fourth game is cookies on the fly. And for that game, as the dog chases you, it can be the back end of cookies in the corner, or you can have somebody restrain your dog so that you're just running away from them.

But when the dog catches up, you have a cookie held in your hand. Your hand is facing towards the dog as they're running. They come running up beside you and just eat the cookie right out of your hand as you're moving. Hence, the name Cookie on the Fly. We don't want you to stop. We don't want to lose the energy of that dog.

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We want you to still be that rabbit, albeit a slower rabbit that the dog comes up and grabs the cookie while you are in motion. Part two of Cookies on the Fly is going to be '*Cookies on the Fly with a twist.*' And for this game, as the dog catches you up, you're going to reverse your hand.

So, the palm of your hand was facing the direction the dog was going. As they come in to eat the cookie, you're going to flip your hand around and change directions into the dog. So, now the dog has to make one hairpin turn to chase the cookie back in the opposite direction in order to earn it.

So, you're running away from the dog. The dog comes up on your right side. You just flick your hand away. You're now going to turn and go back in the exact direction you just came from.

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That's just cookies on the fly with a twist or a hand flip. Now, game number six is again, very closely related, but instead of just flicking your hand, it's '*Cookies on the Fly with a Turn.*' Not a flip, not a twist.

So, as the dog is coming and chasing you, you're going to plant, kind of stare at the dog and turn into the dog. In agility, we call it a Front Cross. So, the dog doesn't go around your body. The dog was chasing on your right side, and you turn so that the cookie is delivered with the left side.



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The dog turns into you, you turn into the dog, you're heading back in the opposite direction, but the cookie's delivered on the left, not on the right. So, that's cookies on the fly with a turn.

Game number seven. Now, your dog may already do this one, but if they've never really been keen on food rewards, possibly not. And that is a great way to deliver food for your dog, especially if you're teaching them something away from you, is to *toss them a cookie and have them catch it*.

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But catching needs to be taught. And so, I like to start with my dog in a sit and I just hold the cookie. I start it maybe down near their face and draw it up slightly, maybe the length of the dog's body up in the air so that they can see it. And then I say, "ready, steady, catch." I dropped the cookie, and it probably is going to bank off their face.

They're not going to see it the first time. It's going to fall on the floor. You can say search and try again. Eventually, they're going to figure out that the cookie, they can get the cookie faster if they just track it from above. Now, if you have a dog that after you've played this several times, they just start looking on the floor saying, "I'll just catch it from the floor."

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Well, if you have another dog, bring them in provided you don't have a resource guarding problem so that the dog that you're tossing the cookies to, if they don't catch the other dog is going to get it off the floor before they do. Or you can just cover it with your foot and pick it up and try it again. We want the dog to care enough to try.

Now your cookies need to be big enough that the dog can track them. Maybe play around with a dark cookie versus a light cookie and see if that's easier for your dog. And something like this, another, a round treat might be easier for your dog to track. Once they're able to catch it from above, and you've paired the word "catch", which at first probably meant just let things bump off your face.

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You've paired that word with them actually catching. Now what you're going to do is go in front of them and toss it underhand but say the same three words, "ready, steady, catch", toss it up in the air so that it lands right in your dog's face.

Now, you might want to practice your mechanics first. Just put a little box against the wall and practice approximately throwing it at the height your dog will need and see if you can get it to land in the box. If you can't get it to land in the box, then you are making it more difficult for your dog.

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So, practice that first. But once you've got the dog that can catch treats, then all you have to say is "catch" from a distance, toss it, and they're going to be able to snag it from anywhere. A dog like Tater Salad, he could be running to me on a recall, and I could throw my treat overhead and he can still catch it. He's such a great catcher.

Game number eight involves a flirt pole. And the first game we're going to play is what I call *Big Game Hunter*. And for that, you're going to take a flirt pole and just get a length of string, cut the length of string and make it into a loop. So, now we have maybe a loop that's about six inches long. You're going to loop one end of that loop through the loop of your flirt pole.



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And the other end, you're just going to fold it over so you can slide a high value treat into that piece of rope. So, it can be a piece of beef jerky. We use rabbit rolls that we get from an indigenous supplier here in Canada. I love supporting this business and my dogs go crazy for these treats plus they're organic. Win, win, win.

So, you're going to just slide the treat in there and you're going to get the dog to chase the flirt pole. Hold them by their collar or by their harness, and you're just going to drag the flirt pole a little bit or drag the toy. You don't have to hold the end of the flirt pole, just the rope for now.

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A short distance, ready, steady, and tell the dog, "Get it, get it, get it, get it.", "Search" before they grab the cookie. Once the dog says, "Hey, this is fun.", you can hold the flirt pole from higher up and maybe have them go in half a circle around your body chasing the reward before they can grab it.

You don't want to tease this dog too much of half a circle around your body at first. Then you can introduce maybe a flip. So, they start going in one direction and you just flip your wrist with the flirt pole, and they circle back in the same direction before they get the big game, hunter wins their game and gets that little piece of beef jerky or whatever you have in your little loop.

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Game number nine, flirt pole again, but this is '*Chase the hidden treasure.*' And for this, you need a food toy. So, that is a toy that you can put a food inside. Now, at first, you just going to let your dog know there's something in there by having, I'm using a gamble ball here where I'll put a cookie in the gamble ball.

Have my dog chase the gamble ball in my hand and tell them "Cook" when they get close enough to grab it. Then I'll cover up the cookie a little bit, let them chase it again in my hand. And then finally, I'll cover it up entirely and let them chase the gamble ball in my hand, knocking it out of my hand.

And then if the gamble ball needs your help to open it, but you know, sometimes they get used so well that as soon as I hit the ground, all the cookies spill out.

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Once they'll chase the gamble ball in your hand, you're just going to attach it to the little string that you had your big game on. And now the dog's going to chase the gamble ball or the food toy with the flirt pole.

Remember again, only one or two steps, hold the dog by the harness, get them excited, get the food ball moving first, and then tell them, "Get it, get it, get it", and let them catch it, and you open it up. If they can't open it up on their own, dump out the cookies.

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These are games that going to engage the dog's prey instinct, chase instinct, and they're going to want to play your games. You're going to have now not only food that the dog loves, but a delivery system that engages the dog.

And the final game really isn't a food game because now you can *transition that flirt pole to just a flirt pole with a toy on the end that the dog chases.* You can build up the duration of the chase. The dog's going to love it and you're going to have a handy toy that you can use to train anything.



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Okay, in addition to these games, the games of chase I've mentioned today and the games of restraint that I'm going to share with you in the next episode, I want you to think about [celebrating big](#). Not cheerleading while the dog is working, not cheerleading while they're chasing, celebrating when they get the reward.

But also, now let's introduce a little bit of anxiety, which people don't like to hear that word associated with their dog. Frustration/anxiety enough to make the dog want it more. It can be as simple as opening up a bag of treats and saying in a really fun voice, "Oh no, what is it?! What's mama got?" as you pick up the cookie.

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If the dog gets excited, it starts bouncing on you. That's awesome. But don't let them have it. We want to build up tension. So often people go, "Oh my God, my dog loves food. I got to release that tension and give it to him."

No, a little bit of tension is a good thing. That tiny little bit of anxiety of frustration is what's going to contribute to your dog's food drive. So, don't be afraid to crank them up a little bit before you start a game.

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And along the same lines, exactly what I mentioned at the beginning of this episode. I have an eBook that I want to share with you. It's an eBook I put together for our online classroom, our Recaller students, but I'm going to share it with you because it's going to be shared with all of our newsletter subscribers.

So, it's [How to Create a Motivating Toy](#). In here, I believe it's on page six, I give you a step-by-step process of how to heighten the excitement via a little frustration and anxiety. It's a game that I started back in the early nineties with one of my Jack Russell Terriers to help build excitement for an obedience retrieve.

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And I've used it with every puppy ever since. And my students have used it with a great deal of success. Now you can use it with anything you want the dog to have value for. I used it for an obedience dumbbell. You can use it for a toy if you want the dog to have a motivating toy, but I also want you to use it with your bags of high value food rewards.

So, follow the process that's in that eBook. Again, I'm giving that eBook away free to all of our newsletter subscribers. So, all that you have to do is click the link that you'll find somewhere in the show notes here, and that will give you an opportunity to sign up for the newsletter. Immediately, we're going to send you that eBook.

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Next up in this series, it's the games of restraint. These are super fun games. I promise you, you're going to love playing these games with any dog, no matter if they're already crazy about food, but just too much to add to one podcast episode.

So, I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog. And by the way, can you please jump over to YouTube? Let me know what you're thinking of the series. Leave me a comment and let me know if you play one of these games, how it goes for you and your dog.





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Free eBook Download:

[Click HERE](#) to get your copy of our "How To Create A Motivating Toy" eBook

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 90: Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value](#)

[YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone \(RZ\) with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 269: Why Do Some Dogs Seem to Have Less Food Drive Than Others – 10 Reasons to Consider](#)

[Podcast Episode 271: Structure Your Dog Training To Create Food Drive In Your Treat Fussy Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 226: Safe Toys For Dogs And Why To Avoid Tennis Balls And Sticks](#)

[Podcast Episode 89: Why Dogs Should Not Tug: The Truth Revealed](#)

[Podcast Episode 41: Get a Behaved Dog by Celebrating Milestones!](#)



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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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