

**BUILD THE SKILL THAT RESOLVES NEARLY EVERY DOG TRAINING STRUGGLE  
WITH THE POWER OF 3-MINUTE GAMES**

# CALM



 **Absolute Dogs**®

Tom Mitchell & Lauren Langman

# COOL, CALM & COLLECTED

Calmness as a concept cannot be overrated.

If you're familiar with the AbsoluteDogs training resources for naughty but nice (NBN) dogs, you will know about the arousal bucket. How your dog's arousal level is made up of lots of little exciting, anxiety inducing or worrying events that all add up, until their bucket is full and all that 'naughty' behaviour comes spilling over as your dog tries to cope with the feelings that have accumulated.

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**Your dog's arousal level is made up of lots of little exciting, anxiety inducing or worrying events that all add up, until their bucket is full**

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Teaching your dog to have calm default behaviours, a calm existence, a generally calm way of being, keeps that bucket empty as a matter of course.

Then, when an exciting, arousing or challenging event happens, the bucket doesn't overflow; it tops up a bit and then, because your dog's brain knows how to be calm it empties right back down again. And because your dog has some great go to calm behaviours, they recover much more quickly when the inevitable exciting, arousing or worrying things happen in their life. Despite those inevitable events, there is minimal arousal stacking; perfect.



# CAUSES OF AROUSAL

The causes of arousal can be positive and negative, but they still add to filling up that bucket.

We realise that all dogs get crazy sometimes, they love to play and do the stuff that they enjoy, we love it when they greet us; when they are super excited to see us, that's part of the joy of having a dog. And sometimes we want our dogs to be crazy, right?

If they're working dogs or sports dogs they need the high drive that is essential to them doing a good job or giving a great performance. We don't want to kill the joy or inhibit the necessary drive; rather we want to give dogs the skills they need to chill out, calm down and to reduce the amount that normal every day life adds to the bucket so that when we need them to be 'on-it' they can give that activity their all – they haven't wasted unnecessary energy on things that didn't really need their attention.

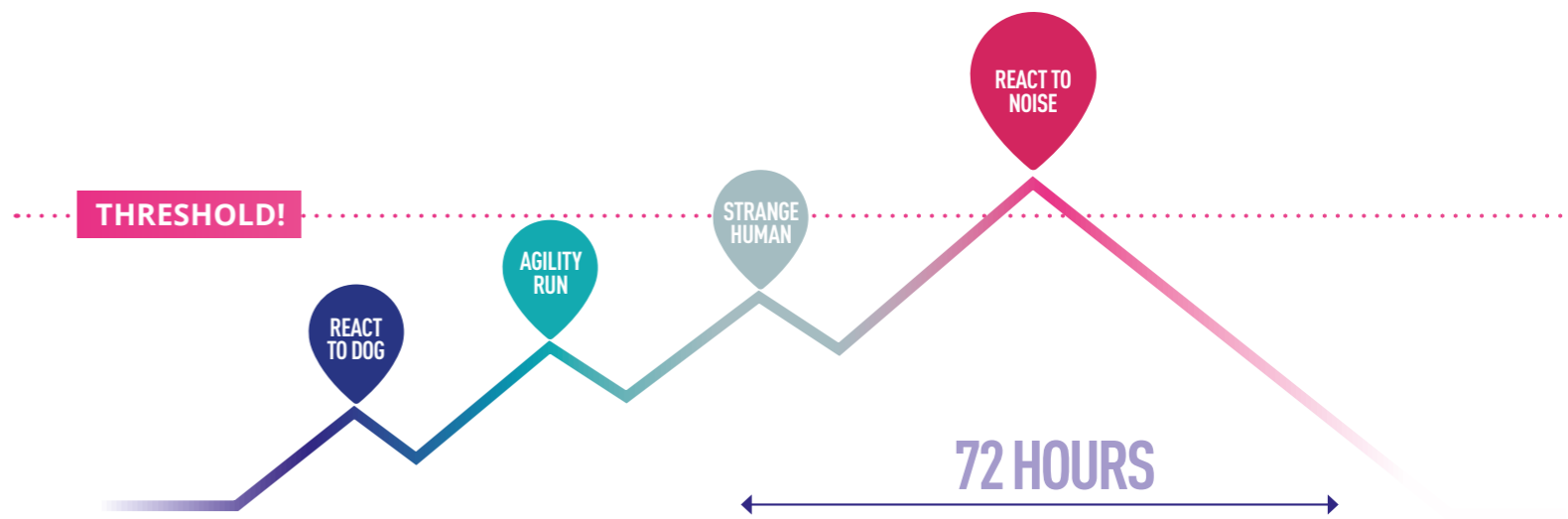
If you teach calmness, then your dog's capability for sport or fun is preserved. They're rested, they're coming from a level base and they can channel all of their energy where you want it. They haven't wasted energy living on the edge. And what's more, calm dogs make good choices.

We cannot tell you how amazing it is to have a dog that understands how to be calm; nor how awesome it can be to have strategies and go-to games for managing excitement levels.

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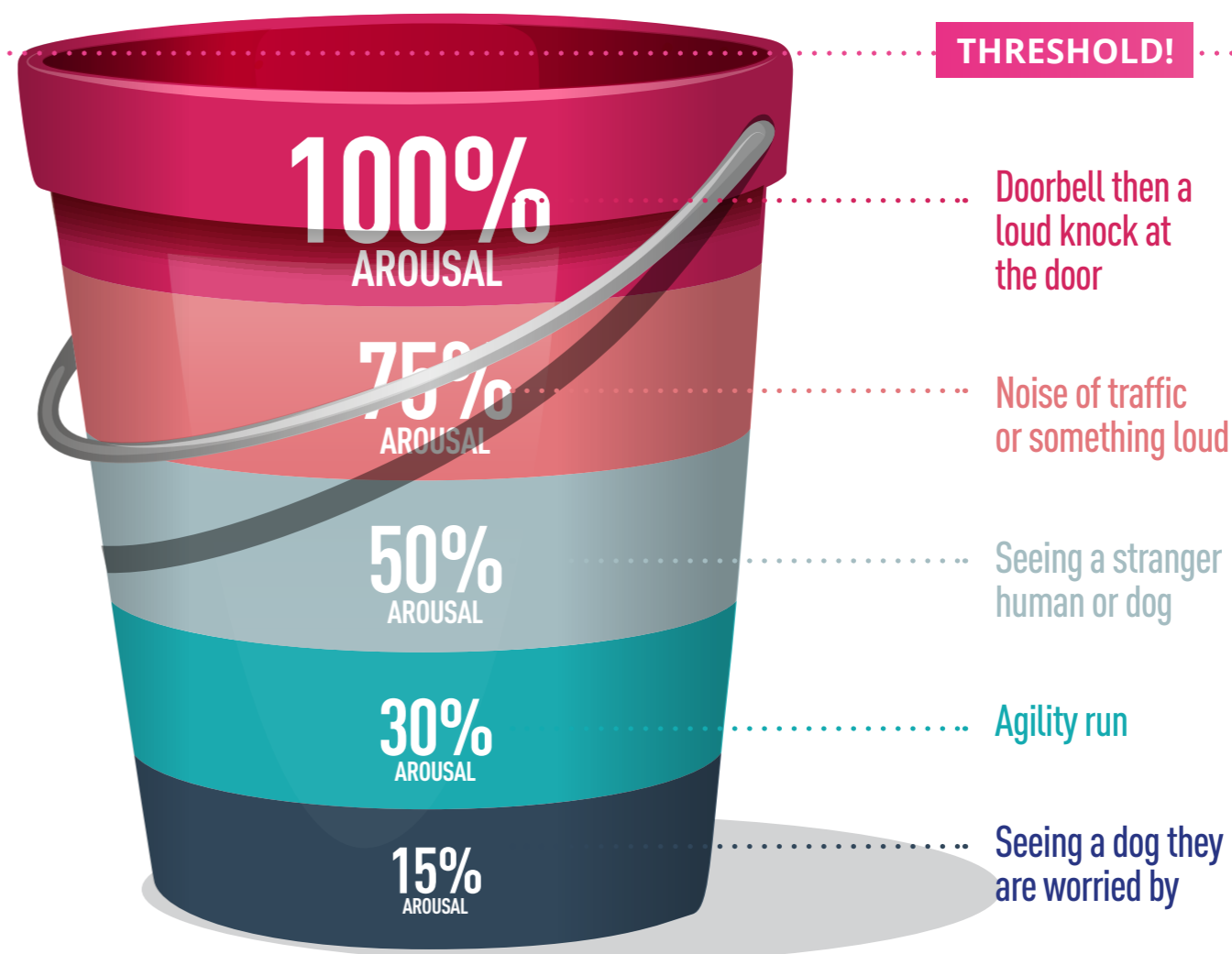
**If you teach calmness, then your dog's capability for sport or fun is preserved**

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**The Arousal Bucket** - small positive or negative triggers of arousal, e.g. an agility run or seeing a dog they are worried by, act as additions to the bucket, pouring a glass of water in. As water is added to the bucket, dogs get closer and closer to threshold.

Beyond this threshold, we may see overarousal or fear responses to relatively mild triggers of fear and anxiety. Further to this, it can take a long time for the bucket to empty, anything up to 72 hours after the initial exposure!



# OVER-AROUSSED BEHAVIOURS

Let's think about some of those over-aroused behaviours for a moment - the behaviours that mean that your dog is having trouble with arousal levels or is struggling to relax:

**\*Lunging; \*barking; \*biting and mouthing; \*destruction; \*separation anxiety; \*pacing; \*whining; \*nagging; \*humping; \*zoomies; \*not eating; \*counter surfing; \*not listening.**

So, excitement is good, and drive and desire great, but only when you want it, seriously, not all the time! That's not good for your dog's health, your peace of mind and the relationship between you.

Do you want a dog that will play and train when you're ready and chill when you want to chill?

Some dogs don't know calmness. They can't do it. Whether they are anxious, worried, over stimulated or their bodies haven't got access to the off switch. This is not good for them and the more that you can teach calmness, the more they will be able to implement it for themselves.

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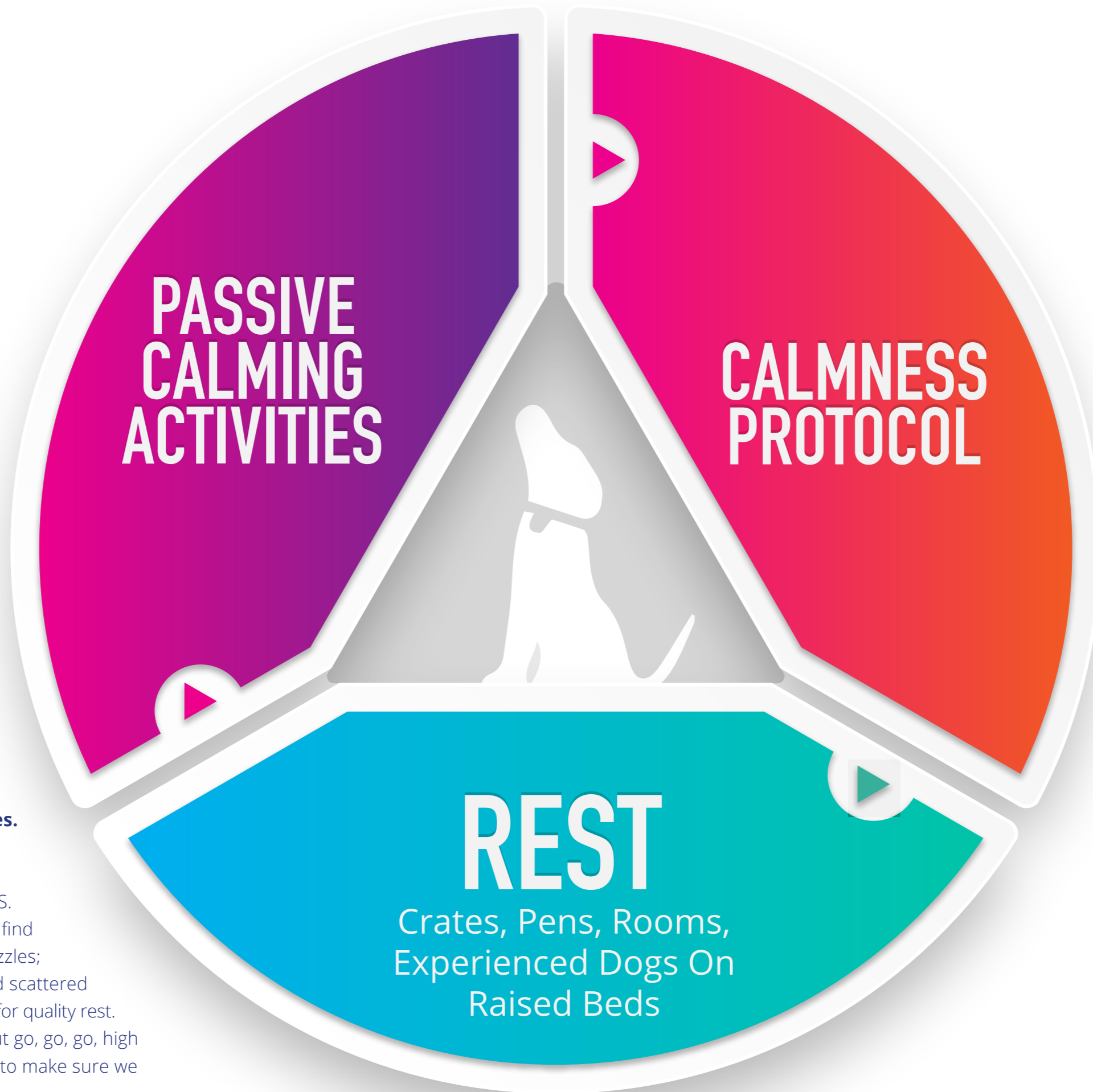


# CALM- NESS TRIAD

Teaching calmness is hugely powerful, but how can you teach your dog to be calm?

Well let's start with some strategies.

We like the CALMNESS triad. Basically, we rotate our dogs through CALMNESS. Time for calming activities: to chew; to find food in a snuffle mat or other food puzzles; to investigate a stuffed chew; or to find scattered food in the garden and, of course, time for quality rest. Our dogs' lives should NOT be all about go, go, go, high arousal games and activities, we need to make sure we include great downtime!



## PASSIVE CALMING ACTIVITIES

- Scatter Feeding
  - Meaty Bones
  - Filled Kongs
  - Treat Balls
- Filled Tracheas
- Dehydrated Treats
  - Scenting
- Puzzle Feeders

## CALMNESS PROTOCOL

Feed whenever calm, time feeding with external distractions and if you want to not train at any time pop them in a crate or give them a passive calming activity. Don't get frustrated.

## REST

- Crates
- Pens
- Rooms
- Experienced dogs on raised beds

# CALMNESS STRATEGIES

## Calm zones:

For a dog that needs to learn calmness, thinking about having some space in your house that is just calm space is super important.

Think about having rooms for training and play and rooms where you chill. If you frequently play crazy tug or throw and fetch in the lounge and then want to sit down to a relaxing movie in the evening, there is no distinction for your dog who may sit throughout the film staring at you waiting for you to play. We call this rehearsing the room! Practise the energy that you want your dog to choose when being in there. Calmness creates more calmness!

## Game-on and game-off:

Having a cue for when it is time to train, time to ask your dog to focus, is a great idea: then your dog knows that it is 'game-on' and time for work. At the other end of the session, you need to let your dog know that it's time to switch off; now we can relax and it's ok to chill: game-off.

## Time-out:

This is a part of the calmness triad but it bears separate emphasis. Making sure that your dog gets enough rest is so essential to his ability to be calm. If that means popping him into a safe space where his choices are limited then that is the way to go. You might use a crate, a pen, a suitable boundary (remember, you need to limit choices for anything except rest) or a smaller room in the house.

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**Making sure that your dog gets enough rest is so essential to his ability to be calm**  
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It's important to build up value for the spaces that you are going to use for time out and for the independence that your dog needs to be happy and relaxed in his time out area. Do this by initially keeping sessions short, staying nearby (visit often) and making the area super rewarding by providing calm feeding opportunities.

## Exercise is arousing. Fitness doesn't need to be:

It's easy to give our dogs a chase game or allow them to play in the expectation that it will wear them out. It's a typical response to an overactive dog isn't it? Give them more exercise. But if your dog is reactive or overactive because he can't relax and his arousal bucket is full, then exercise is going to increase that arousal level, not alleviate it.

After an arousing or over stimulating event, we recommend 72 hours of calmness, and that includes avoiding arousing and stimulating exercise. That doesn't mean no exercise at all and we have a great programme of fitness strategies that includes a lot of activities for your dog to do that are calming but still build fitness.

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**Activities for your dog that are calming but still build fitness**  
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## Ditch the Food Bowl:

If you really need to focus on calmness, then you need all the help that you can get to communicate to your dog that calm is the way to be. The best way of doing that is to use as much of your dog's daily food allowance for rewarding and encouraging calm behaviours.

Calmness feeding can include a snuffle mat, a stuffed hoof, kong or other toy, or scatter feeding. Scatter feeding is a really awesome and super easy method of feeding to encourage calm. You can use it at home and out on walks. The activity of snuffling on the floor and searching out the food is super calming for your dog – especially when you time the scatter feed with outside distractions.

## Ditch the routine:

Dog's are born predicting. It's a survival skill – learning to predict where the food will be and when there's danger is essential for survival. Increasing flexibility and limiting opportunities for prediction will truly enhance calmness for your dog.

*You create  
your own  
calm.  
Calm is  
a super  
power.*

# AND NOW TO THE GAMES

You know that we love games for training. Now that we've talked about some daily strategies and life changes that will help your dog to understand that calmness is ok, you can really enhance that learning and truly develop a default behaviour of calmness with the power of games.

Here are some of our favourite calmness generating games.

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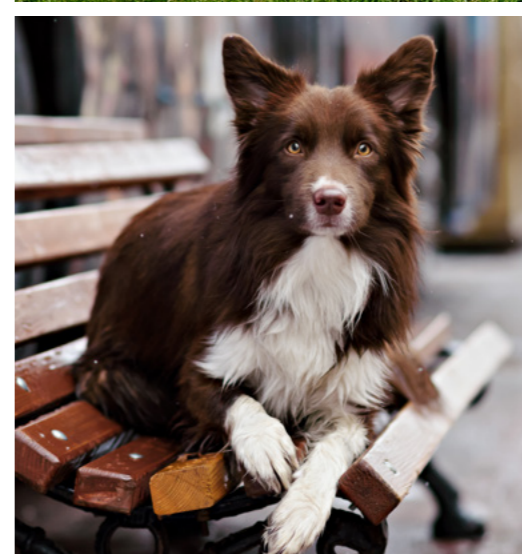
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CALMNESS | GAME 01

# REWARD CALM

This game is as simple as it sounds. Catch your dog being calm and reward it. Now, this game can be a little counterintuitive at first. Your dog has just settled down and might be about to go to sleep, if you reward your dog now, they're going to wake up and you have to start waiting for calmness all over again.

We know that is hard to start with, we really do. But here's the thing, your dog will learn that being calm is the way to get the reward. And being calm will gradually become the behaviour that they are more willing to offer more often.

Beware the fake calm though – knowing that they get a reward for lying on their bed or on the end of the sofa or wherever,

might prompt a very active and deliberate performance of that behaviour: head pressed down into the bed, eyes wide open and watching your every move? Fake calm alert! Look out for this and don't reward it.

Just one more thing! Your method of rewarding is super important too. Obviously, you need to deliver any reward in a really calm way. This could be a slowly delivered food reward or a calm stroke or even a calm and softly spoken word of praise.

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**Your dog will learn that being calm is the way to get the reward**

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CALMNESS | GAME 02

# REWARD NOTHING

This is a great use for that daily food allowance. Basically, you are rewarding your dog for not reacting. Begin to feed promptly (but calmly) when an event happens that would normally promote an excited reaction. Knock at the door, feed your dog for doing nothing; someone walks past the window, feed your dog for doing nothing; new person enters a training area, feed your dog for doing nothing.

Make sure your feeding is prompt but that you feed calmly and slowly. The aim is that when exciting reaction prompting things happen in your dog's environment, they check in with you and expect calmness. How cool is that?

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See a distraction, use a  
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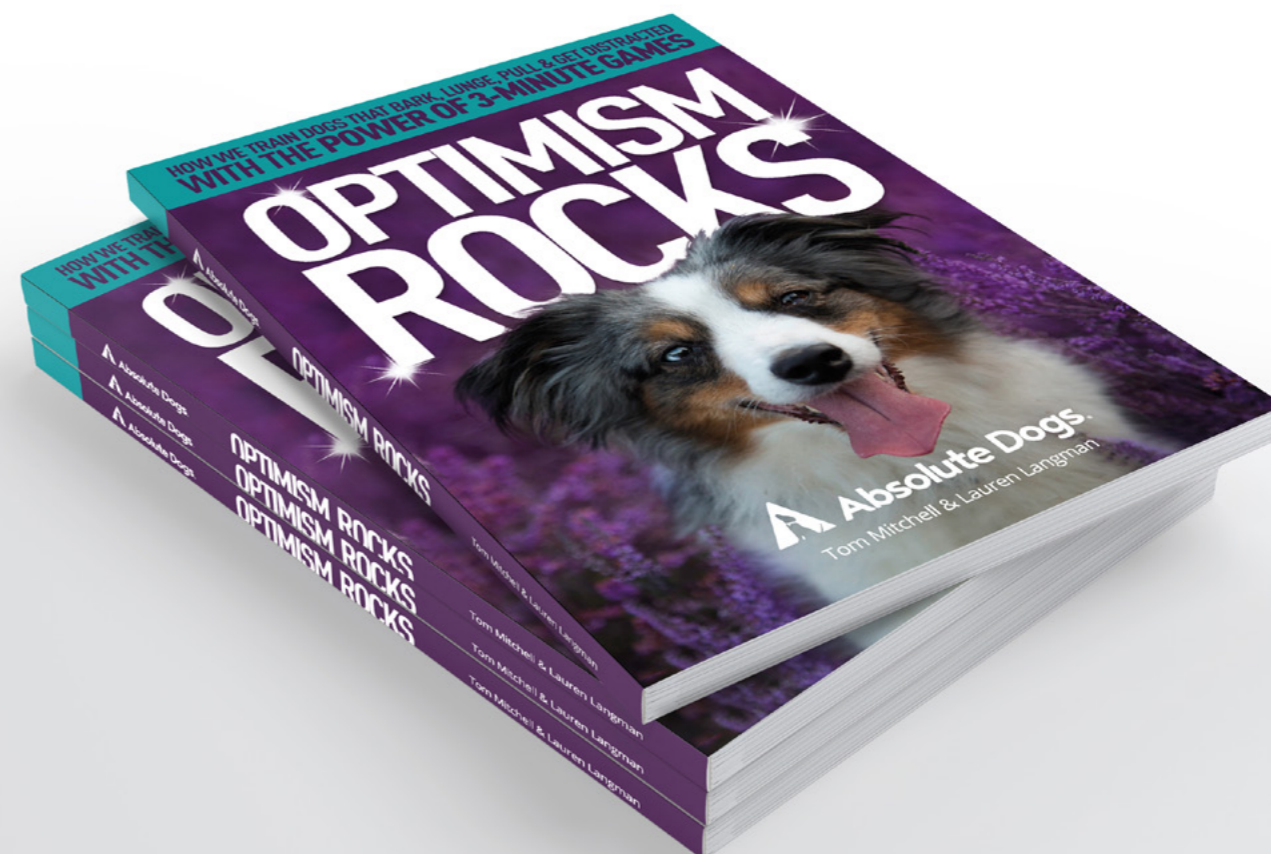
CALMNESS | GAME 03

# DMT: DISTRACT, MARK, TREAT

This is one of our favourite go to games for calmness in NBN dogs. See a distraction, use a calm marker and then deliver a treat. There are three stages for developing DMT and we talk about these in our Optimism Rocks ebook.

Like reward nothing, playing DMT will begin to teach your dog that exciting things in the environment mean that they should check in with you and be calm.

Whether your dog gets excited because he is fearful of another dog in the distance or frustrated because he wants to chase a car or squirrel, DMT can really promote calmness.



CALMNESS | GAME 04

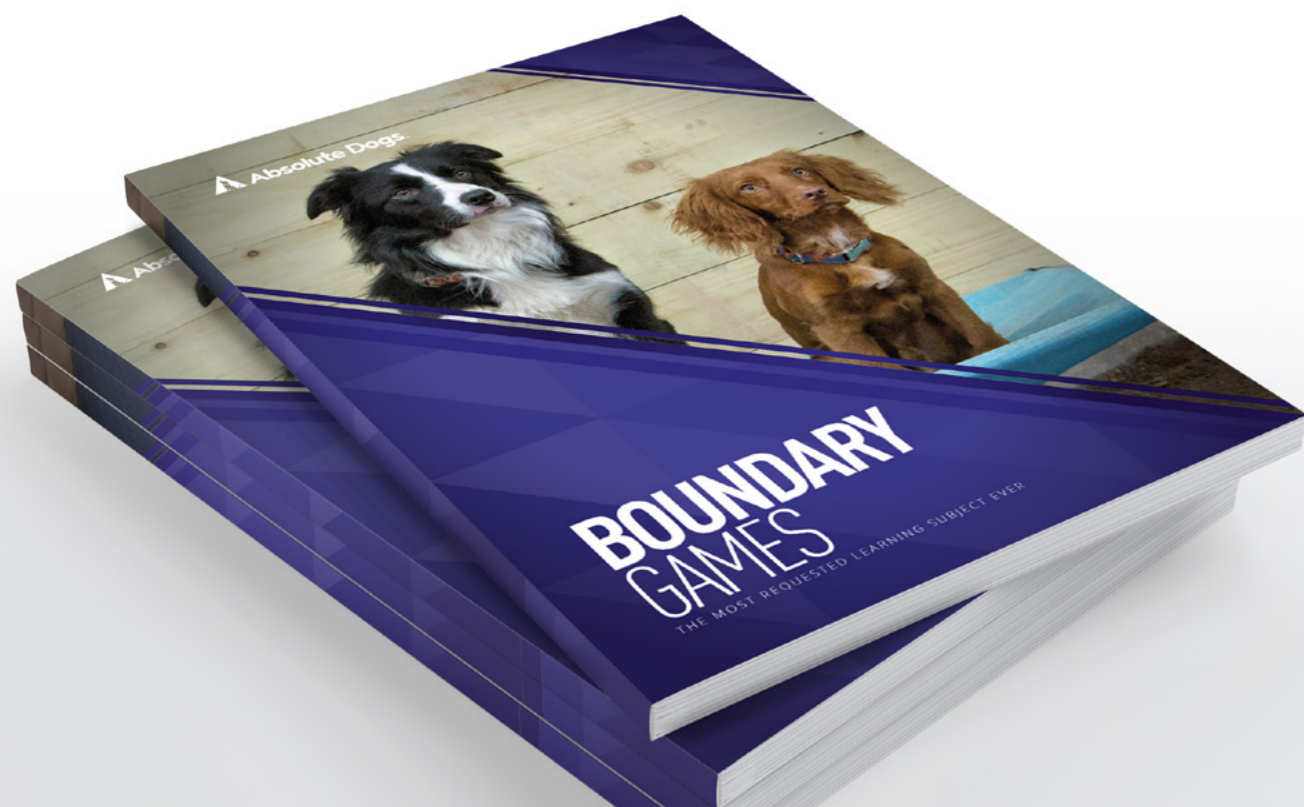
# BOUNDARY GAMES

Boundary games are fundamental to a calm household. Teaching your dog the super choice of resting calmly on their bed or any designated area is what boundary games are about.

The benefit of boundary games for you and your dog is really far reaching but for calmness they are indispensable.

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**Boundary games are fundamental to a calm household**

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Rewarding your dog for being on a boundary - a bed, a mat, a crate, a sofa - in a calming way promotes calmness and self control and gives your dog a super safe calm zone to chill out whatever is going on in the household.





CALMNESS | GAME 05

# SELF CONTROL GAMES

Self-control games that reward your dog with the treat that they are resisting with the power of self-control are amazing for calming your dogs mind.

We like the mouse game which is in the boundary games ebook. Place the food in front of your dog on the floor and cover it with your hand – like caging a mouse. Keep your hand in place while your dog tries to get the food – just stay steady and protect that food. The instant

your dog moves back, feed him with the food from under your hand. Build up this game, gradually increase the time between your dog pulling back and delivering the reward.

As your dog's self-control develops, you can increase the difficulty of this game: make the treats better, leave the food uncovered for longer, play around with the food under your dog's nose etc.

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**As your dog's self control develops, you can increase the difficulty of this game**  
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CALMNESS | GAME 06

# MIDDLE

We love middle. We say it a lot but middle can be used for lots of things, and for a dog that needs an instant safe zone middle is invaluable. Whilst middle can be part of an arousing game, if you use middle as a place of calmness, it can really add to your calmness toolbox.

For middle to be calming, it is important to use calm words, steady movements and slow feeding. When you are teaching middle as a safe and calm space at first, then feed frequently but slowly.



We have a video of this game to share with you.

<http://absolutedogstraining.com/lesson/middle-18/>

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CALMNESS | GAME 07

# SLOOOOW FEEDING

As well as using your reward speed as part of training calmness in relation to particular strategies, slow feeding is a super strategy on its own.

Simply have your dog sit or lie wherever they happen to be and hand feed them. The feeding, though, is super super slow. If they jump up or reach forward for the food, move it away – they only get the reward when they restrain themselves and wait for the food to arrive at their mouth.

Think about the whole food journey from the food pot to your dog's mouth as part of the reward ritual.

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CALMNESS | GAME 08

# TWO ON

Two paws up on an object and then feeding for stillness in that position is a really super cool way of promoting calm.

Use an easy, grippy and stable object like a small block or box. Place this on the floor between yourself and your dog and then steadily encourage your dog towards you, feeding at the point when his front paws are on the object.

Luring is a much calmer method of teaching an activity rather than shaping. Whilst your dog's paws are on the object, feed slowly and frequently.

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**Luring is a much calmer method of teaching an activity rather than shaping**

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CALMNESS | GAME 09

# FIGURE OF EIGHT WALKING

Figure eight walking for calmness is like a moving meditation with your dog. Placing two objects on the ground to walk around helps you to focus on the path and avoids introducing new smells that might distract your dog from the exercise.

Having marked out your path, simply walk with your dog on a loose lead. Keep going slowly and steadily. Try not to use food, just use your motion to encourage your dog with you. And if you think that you are going slowly, go slower.

This strategy takes a while to get right but once you've got it, then it is an amazing tool.

You can almost feel the point at which your dog relaxes into the motion of the regular and steady rhythm of the walk.

The more that you practice figure eight walking, the quicker your dog will settle into the rhythm. It's a great way of calming in new environments that would otherwise provoke a frenzy of excitement.

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**Try not to use food, just use your motion to encourage your dog with you. And if you think that you are going slowly, go slower**

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CALMNESS | GAME 10

# MAGIC HAND

In the midst of an exciting and distracting environment that may trigger your dog's excitement, frustration or anxiety, magic hand is an awesome way of capturing their focus and promoting calm.

Start with a simple catch; use a simple throw and an easy target – something large and light coloured. If your dog doesn't make an effort to catch then, when the food falls on the floor, you can grab it and make a big deal about the fact that you got it first.

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Once your dog has got the catching down, begin to deliver the food through your fingers whilst the back of your hand is presented flat to your dog. Gradually encourage your dog to place himself under your hand when you are playing the game, the aim is that when you give the cue (by having your hand in the magic hand position) your dog places himself underneath your hand, ready to catch the food.

As you progress at the game, you can begin to move around, slowly at first, so that your dog has to focus to make sure that he stays in the right spot to catch the falling treats. Don't be tempted to help him out too much by moving your hand for his benefit. Magic hand is great when you are out & about.





CALMNESS | GAME 11

# CALMNESS CONVERSATION STARTERS

Conversation starters are very well rehearsed behaviours that your dog knows really well. Often associated with a particular object, conversation starters are the behaviours that you can ask for in different places to promote flexibility.

If you want to work on your dog's calmness, then it is easy to take the games that we have talked about here and use them in places and spaces where your dog may be overexcited, frustrated or anxious.

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**Manage your dog's arousal levels wherever and whenever you need to**

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Having calmness conversation starters in your toolbox truly helps you to manage your dog's arousal levels wherever and whenever you need to. If your dog won't listen, don't get frustrated, pull out a well rehearsed and rewarding calmness conversation starter.

CALMNESS | GAME 12

# MESSAGE: MATCH, CATCH & REGULATE

Massage is a really nice way of promoting calmness, but sometimes, a slow massage doesn't have the effect that you expect. Trying to use a slow massage or a slow walk on a dog who is agitated and over aroused can, actually, have the opposite effect.

When massaging, you may need to match the speed of your massage to your dog's arousal level. As you get the pace right, you may notice that you can tune into the rhythm of your dog's breathing and then you can catch his pace switching the focus to you and then

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manipulating the arousal level by gradually slowing the pace of your breath and the massage to regulate your dog's arousal levels, promoting calmness.



One of  
the best  
lessons you  
can learn  
in life is  
to master  
how to  
remain calm.





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