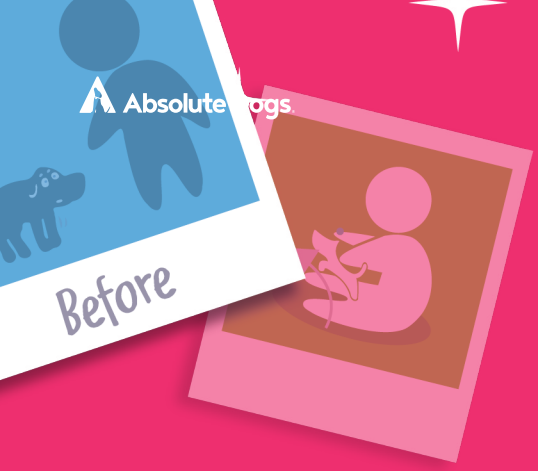
THERE'S A GAME FOR THAT

# YOUR RESCUE DOG




## Growing a Confident Rescue Dog

Absolute Dogs




THERE'S A GAME FOR THAT

# YOU CAN'T BUY LOVE, BUT YOU CAN RESCUE IT!

## Congratulations! You are amazing!

We just want to take a moment to congratulate you on the incredible decision you have made to welcome a rescue dog into your life! Not only are you bringing a new family member into your home – and your heart – you are giving a very special dog a forever home and a second chance to live their best life and that is something to be celebrated!

We know taking on a rescue dog can come with its own struggles and just like with any other dog, life with a rescue can have its ups and downs. Before we dive in to all the amazing, game-changing solutions we've got to share with you to help turn those struggles into strengths and create a calm, confident and happy dog, we just want you to focus on the wonderful new world of love, joy, adventure and absolute fun your rescue dog is going to bring.

It's going to be fantastic! Are you excited? We can't wait to share this journey with you!

# SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

**Bringing a rescue dog home is a big, exciting and important day. It can also be a day where there's a chance for a lot to go wrong if you don't have the right knowledge to prepare you and the right strategies in place.**

To set yourself up for success and get off to the right start, there are some extremely valuable things to consider before your new dog even comes home, such as:

- What do you want your lifestyle with them to actually look like?
- How would you like them to behave in the house?
- What kind of energy level do you want each room in the house to have?
- Do you have other dogs in your household and would you like to have a different set of rules for your new dog?

Basically, you should think through what rules or guidelines you have – or would like to have – in your household that you would like your new dog to follow?

Maybe you would prefer your new dog to stay off the furniture and have the kitchen or your upstairs area a dog-free zone. Perhaps your living room will be a place of calmness, while the back garden will be for all out fun and games! Maybe your dog will have free rein in the house and sleep on the bed with you!

Whatever you decide, remember these are your guidelines. This is your home and your dog. You get to establish what the rules are and whatever you want to allow – or not allow – is totally up to you!

## What sort of guidelines would you like you have in your household for your new dog?

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## Understanding your rescue dog

The next step in setting yourself – and your new dog – up for success is making sure that you understand your rescue dog, their past and what sort of situation they are coming to you from. Being aware of where your rescue dog has come from and their history in their previous home, rescue centre and/or foster home before coming to you is vital as it can help you determine the best ways to approach bringing them into your life.

Taking the time to get to know your dog, both before and after they come into your home can really help you start off on the right track. From the very beginning you can come up with a plan for introducing your dog to your home, family and lifestyle and you can also begin to formulate their initial training plan to really ensure they have a successful start in their new life with you.

## Coping with change

Change can be stressful. No matter what your dog's past life may have looked like before coming to join your family, there is no question that they will be facing so many life-changing experiences and they are going to be feeling quite stressed and overwhelmed by it all.

Not only does change cause stress in a dog's life, it can also really impact their overall health and wellbeing, especially when it comes to the brain and gut, which can lead to changes in behaviour and tummy troubles!

To help support your new dog from the inside out in this time of change, you might like to have some Calm-K9 supplement on hand to support their brain and gut health and promote calmness. All it takes is just a scoop a day to set your dog up for success!




# Growing your relationship bank account

Imagine that your relationship with your dog is a lot like a bank account - it has good things (deposits) going in and not so great things (withdrawals) coming out throughout the day as you interact with your dog.

To invest and pay into this relationship bank account you need to provide your dog with positive feedback, interactions and experiences. Your dog will quickly begin to understand that you are enormously valuable to them, that you are relevant and that being with you is huge fun! The more your dog values (or likes) the experiences you place yourself at the centre of and share with them, the bigger the relationship investment.

If you get frustrated or unhappy with your dog and scold them, you are withdrawing from the bank account. When your dog makes mistakes, they do not realize they have made a mistake. They do not understand the difference between right and wrong. All your dog knows is that the ability to make that choice was available. It is your responsibility as a dog owner to provide your dog with the information they need so that they know which choices are the best choices.

When you focus on mistakes and on correction, you often cannot communicate in a way that makes sense to your dogs. Your dog does not make connections with the discipline or punishment for the offense and they can get confused and worried about making mistakes. You want to avoid these interactions so that your relationship doesn't become damaged at the very start.

You want your relationship to be founded on trust and clarity. It is immensely important to be aware of your relationship bank account and to emphasise the importance of depositing amazing interactions and value into you and your dog's relationship. Plus, when you have to make a withdrawal (trimming their nails or giving them a bath), they don't mind so much because there is such a fantastic history of support and of you being the bringer of awesomeness and joy!

**Want more info? Check out the Sexier than a Squirrel Podcast!** In the official podcast of AbsoluteDogs, veterinary behaviourist Tom Mitchell and international agility competitor and professional dog trainer Lauren Langman talk training your dog, transforming your dog training struggles and getting real-life results through GAMES! Every week there's a new episode AND it's free to subscribe.

**Check out this episode: "My Dog Hates Me".** In this episode we dive deeper into the Relationship Bank Account. We chat about predictors AND how they influence your dog, what you can do to make predictable events less predictable, how you can replenish your relationship bank account with your dog AND how little daily actions can have a huge positive impact on that relationship!'

**Listen now!**



# WELCOMING HOME YOUR NEW RESCUE

The day you welcome your new rescue into your new home is a very exciting day. It's the start of your new lives together and it's likely going to be exciting and overwhelming in equal measures for both of you!

Your new rescue may arrive full of eagerness and optimism, ready to explore and taking everything in their stride – they may even walk in and claim the sofa as if they own the place!

It's also entirely possible your dog will enter your home cautiously, unsure of their strange new world and worried about all the sights, smells and sounds of this brand new environment.

No matter how your dog approaches their introduction to your home, we know every dog is an individual and has their own personality and individual needs. By taking what you already know about your dog and observing their behaviour when they arrive in your home, you can be ready to flex and adapt to those needs as much as you can to give them the time and space they might need to feel comfortable and to settle in.

## Getting to know your dog

The first step in this brand new adventure is simply getting to know your new dog. It's about observing their behaviour and interactions with you, your family and the surrounding environment and learning not only what they are comfortable with and what they seem to enjoy, but also what might worry them or cause them to feel anxious.

You might find that while your dog absolutely loves belly rubs, they may be quite worried if you try to stroke their head or rub their ears. It may be that your dog is only comfortable when sleeping with people nearby, or maybe they prefer an area to themselves. They may be nervous around sounds of cooking in the kitchen, but not bat an eyelid during a thunderstorm. You might find your new rescue is essentially a bombproof dog and nothing seems to phase them.

Spending time getting to know your dog in those early days is immensely important as it allows you to get to know their personality and grow your understanding of them whilst also beginning to grow your relationship.

> All good things begin with a dream. The dream becomes a vision. The vision becomes a plan. The plan becomes reality.
>
> Unknown

# LETTING YOUR RESCUE SETTLE IN

It is super essential to give your dog time. In those first few days and weeks, it will be so important to give your dog space, to keep the pressure off and avoid overfacing them with too many new things. They need time to settle in, time to relax and adjust to their new home and environment and they need time for calmness and rest.

## Calmness is a way of life

Calmness as a concept is an invaluable skill for any dog of any age to learn and understand. It is something you can begin to grow from the very first day your new rescue comes home and it can be a huge part of the solution to avoiding a lot of frustrating doggy behaviours.

Your new rescue dog will be coming to you with their own unique impulses in how they interact with the world around them, whether they are joining your family as a puppy, an adolescent or as an adult dog, but no matter what kind of training they've had (or lack of training) you can still grow your dog's understanding of Calmness!

A dog who is calm for the majority of the day is a pleasure to live with. A dog that has learned calmness and can relax in any and every environment is less likely to be reactive, barking and lunging at things that startle, scare, or frustrate them. Having a default state of calmness is vital for your dog as they will be able to perceive change in the world and to think clearly enough not to overreact, feel threatened, and control fast impulses.

When in doubt, we want our dogs to choose calmness over anything else, because when they are calm, every choice they make is a great one! You can never have too much calmness!

Teaching calmness is hugely powerful, but how can you grow this learning?
We have a strategy for that! Let us introduce you to something we like to call the Calmness Triad. It's our triangle of life and it is definitely something to make a part of every day!

The Calmness Triad is all about structuring your dog's day to promote and encourage calm behaviour throughout the day. It's about making time for calming activities, rewarding calm behaviour and making time for quality rest.






## PASSIVE CALMING ACTIVITIES...

Activities that you can employ your dog in and by the nature of them doing it, they are behaving appropriately, and the activity itself encourages calmness.

Employ your dog in a calming activity where your involvement is minimal. It is their time to enjoy some enrichment. This could be things like, Scatter Feeding, Stuffed Kongs, Filled Tracheas, Dehydrated Treats, Scenting, Puzzle Feeders and so much more!

## CALMNESS PROTOCOL...

Or as we like to call it; the REWARD NOTHING Game - is all about using your dog's daily food allowance, not feeding them in a bowl, but putting that value into calmness.

Capture spontaneous moments of calm, catch them doing what you want and reward it! Success with this game only comes when you embrace your inner-ninja (or the way in which you deliver the reinforcement)!

Try to avoid rewarding fake calm and action prompting; quick, jerky behaviours that are actually prompting you to reinforce them before they actually are calm.

## ACTIVE REST...

Is all about making sure your dog gets enough rest - it's so essential to their ability to be calm.

This is an opportunity in your dog's life where they can be popped into a safe space where all their choices are simplified and only a singular choice (rest, calm) is available. You might use a crate, a pen, a suitable bed or boundary (remember, you need to limit choices for anything except rest) or a smaller room.

It's important to build up value for the spaces that you are going to use and for the independence that your dog needs to be happy and relaxed in their area. Do this by initially keeping sessions short, staying nearby (visit often) and making the area super rewarding by providing calm feeding opportunities.

# Ditching that Food Bowl

You feed your dog every day. Your dog needs food to sustain them. You've seen how excited a dog can get at meal times - don't underestimate the value your dog places on their food, and by food we don't mean treats - we mean your dog's daily allocation of food, whether that's kibble, canned or raw.

When you feed your dog in a bowl, you are giving away value. Imagine that your dog's food bowl is actually a little pot of gold - something of immense value that you can use to your advantage; value that you can pour into your relationship bank account every single day. That sounds pretty amazing, right?

This is a little something we like to call Ditch the Bowl and it's a massively powerful concept.

When your dog wakes up every morning, they have their own little pot of value (i.e. food) for that day and you get to decide where and how that pot of value is divided and feed your dog as and when you want to around your busy lifestyle. Each day, you'll measure out your dog's daily ration and then look for opportunities to play. That's right, play!

Take some of the food and carry it with you or distribute it around the house. You want food in every room as you never know when an opportunity to play, reward or reinforce will strike. Always be ready to catch your dog doing something right.

Some dogs may take a few days to figure out and adapt to ditching the bowl, but it won't take as long as you might think - once they figure out food means fun, it's game on!

One thing Ditch the Bowl definitely doesn't mean is constant feeding - you will still get to control when and how much your dog eats and you can adapt it to suit any household rules or guidelines you might have for your dog. It's so easy to shape into and around any lifestyle.

**Click here for Ditch the Bowl eBook**



# GROWING A CONFIDENT AND OPTIMISTIC DOG

Confidence is king for all dogs, but it's even more important for rescue dogs. Confidence is your dog's ability to handle novelty in their environment and quickly recover without overthinking it. Confidence is when your dog is certain they can tackle whatever obstacle stands before them.

Optimism rocks! It can be present in all areas of your dog's life. If your dog is optimistic, anything new is nothing to be worried about - they are going to take it all and power on happily.

Some dogs, especially those who have gone through significant change or who might have come from a place where they have not felt in control of their environment, might struggle with confidence or optimism - or both. This is where we can help you, and your new rescue.

We like to think of confidence as being like a muscle - you can change, develop and grow optimism very easily and you can boost your dog's overall confidence in everyday life situations.

Once your new rescue dog has had some time to decompress and settle into your home, you can slowly begin to grow their confidence and optimism. The most important aspect of working with any dog is to train the dog in front of you - in other words, set your dog up for success and work with, play and interact with them in a way that is appropriate and comfortable for your dog.

Through the power of games we will help you understand these key concepts and share with you some of our super optimistic, confidence building top tips and games to grow and empower your rescue dog!

**Check out this episode of the Sexier than a Squirrel Podcast:** "The power of games for rescue dogs (feat. Caroline Johnson)". We talk on how special the animal and human relationship truly can be, how they have been able to enhance and enrich the lives of the animals they work with and how they provide diversity and games each day.

**Listen now!**



THERE'S A GAME FOR THAT

# TOP GAMES FOR RESCUES

And other dogs as well! Over the next few pages we're going to show you some games that are perfect for Rescue Dogs.

# GAME 1 - CARDBOARD CHAOS



## Concepts: Optimism, Confidence, Independence

The absolute best way to play is to vary this game each time by introducing different novel items every time you play. Use your imagination, use cardboard, tinfoil, bits of bubble wrap, paper – anything that makes a noise. Make it random, unique & unusual.

Cardboard Chaos can be played anywhere - your living room, kitchen, hallway, bathroom, or even your garden or driveway - the possibilities are endless!

Start with a single, shallow box so that your dog doesn't feel overwhelmed. If you find that it's too easy, add more boxes of different sizes in future sessions to meet them at their level.

Set up your space with your box - or collection of boxes in a pile as you progress. Scatter some of your dog's daily food allowance into the pile and allow your dog to independently investigate. This is a game that you get to observe. It gives you so much information about how your dog responds to movement beneath their feet, the sounds of the boxes as they move, and how resilient they are when faced with a challenge or novelty. Be careful not to add in any pressure, no luring and no pulling on their lead (if they are wearing one).

When your dog takes a step towards the box or pile to investigate, let them see you gently toss or bowl a piece of food their way (or just behind them). Rewarding your dog for their bravery, but also taking any pressure off them by rewarding away and allowing them to move away if they are worried.

When your dog takes a step towards the box or pile to investigate, let them see you gently toss or bowl a piece of food their way (or just behind them), rewarding your dog for their bravery, but also taking any pressure off them by rewarding away and allowing them to move away if they are worried.

Remember to keep in mind your observations about your dog and what can worry them or make them wary. Play this game to your dog's level, start out small and simple - be patient and let them work out how to move forward in their own time - and grow the game as your dog's confidence grows.

THERE'S A GAME FOR THAT

# GAME 2 - NOISE BOX

Growing optimism and confidence in the face of novelty has never been more fun!

## Concepts: Optimism, Confidence, Independence

Fill a washing up bowl, box, paddling pool (anything you have) with safe items that make a noise. We like paper, bubble wrap, cans and ball pit balls.

Allow your dog to explore the objects whilst scattering some of their daily food allowance into the noise box and let them explore and eat at their own pace (remember, the food you scatter is just another fun way for them to eat their dinner).

Start with just a few items and add more noise as your dog's confidence grows. This game is going to hugely boost their confidence. If at any moment your dog is worried by the box, go back a step and try to develop their confidence more gradually, maybe help them out a bit - this is an exercise to grow their confidence, not to worry them!

Vary the box and its contents as often as you can and utilise all recycling and boxes that arrive at your house!

# GAME 3 - BALANCE PATHS

## Concepts: Optimism, Confidence, Disengagement

You never quite know what is up ahead. A Balance Path is an obstacle course we set up for dogs of all ages. You can use anything in your house that is dog-safe as an obstacle.

Imagine creating a short path made up of a variety of objects, including different sounds, touch and movement experiences and making this a pathway your rescue dog can follow - an empty box, a cushion in a carrier bag, an upside down washing basket, some bubble wrap over a fitness step, a body board, a child's ball pit.

Use your imagination - the options are endless, but remember to keep the path safe.

Variety and slowness are key with this game. Reinforce their choices to follow the path. Observe your dog's body language and form to see where they find things challenging. To make this even easier, place small pieces of food along the path for your dog to follow. Learn to note when your dog is comfortable and uncomfortable with things: understanding your dog's body language is a valuable skill.

# GAME 4 – GO COMMANDO

## Concepts: Optimism, Confidence, Proximity

This is a game where you build confidence AND value in proximity to you! It can be a challenge for most dogs to be comfortable with close proximity. For this game you will need some of your dog's daily food allowance and YOU!

Sit on the floor if possible and have fun with this. Build confidence with this game by luring your dog over your legs, under your legs, round your feet and onto your legs from your feet up your legs and if possible onto your body.

Observe your dog as you play, and look to see if they are avoiding placing their feet on you. Build towards complete confidence and comfort with them being on and very near to you. As with all games play within your physical limits depending on the size of your dog.

# GAME 5 - TWO PAWS ON

## Concepts: Optimism, Confidence, Calmness, Disengagement

Two paws up on an object and then feeding for stillness in that position is a really super cool way of promoting calmness, as well as boosting your dog's optimism. This is a game we often use as a 'conversation starter' because it's a great one to take to new environments and give your dog a familiar object and behaviour they know really well that they can succeed at when they are somewhere novel. Your dog will feel like a superhero!

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

# GAME 6 - MIGHTY MIDDLE

## Concepts: Engagement, Flexibility, Proximity

Now this really is as mighty and awesome as it sounds! Middle is a super cool and fun foundation game that grows the concept of proximity and confidence. You will need some of your dog's daily food allowance for this game, as well as some creativity and flexibility.

A great way to teach this game is to place a piece of food in front of your dog's nose with them facing you. Lure them slowly around one side of your body so that they are coming behind you, then with great coordination (or none whatsoever!) reach with your other hand between your legs (you can swap the food into your other hand as you go, or simply have two pieces of food, one in each hand) to lure them through.

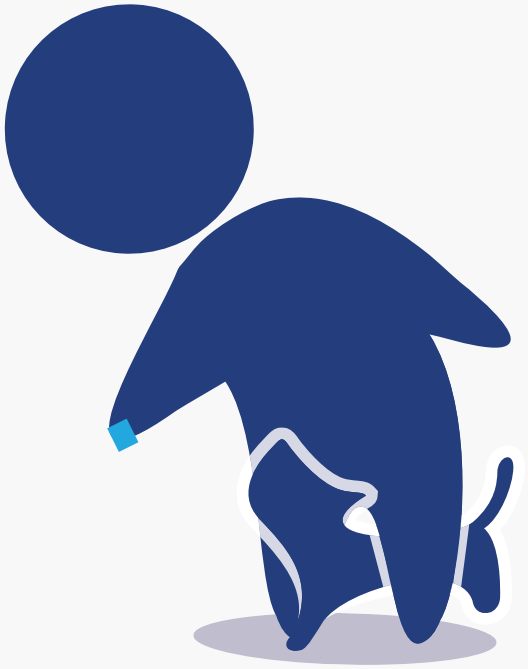
This can look awkward at first, and yet it's great once you get the hang of it. We use this game for recall, as a safety position, a vet handling position, and so much more.

Your next step is to mix this up – change the placement of the food (for example place to your left or right instead of behind you or imagine you are the centre of a clock face and you place the food around each number on the clock). Can your dog come back into your middle? This will help your dog learn to find Middle from any position at all!

To build duration on your Middle position, you can feed more and more in position between your legs before you toss a piece of food in front of you to release them.

You can also add a release cue if you'd like! We say "Ok Go" or something along those lines a second before we toss the food ahead to release our dogs from position. It's a great confidence building game for dogs of all ages and aides with socialisation as they get accustomed to you leaning over them.

Practice Middle anywhere and everywhere - it's a game for every single environment!



# GAME 7 – YOU CAN TOUCH THIS

## Concepts: Arousal Down, Calmness, Confidence, Optimism

So many dogs would choose to avoid being handled. Teaching your dog to accept being touched is super important for so many reasons.

To boost confidence and optimism for a dog that's wary of being touched - choose to regularly reward any handling opportunities with your dog. You don't need to make a huge deal of this, you just calmly stroke and feed and add value to being stroked when your dog is a little more settled and calm. For general confidence it's important that you encourage your dog to be confident being handled.

**TRY:**

- ✓ Gently stroking ears
- ✓ Lifting paws
- ✓ Checking pads
- ✓ Looking under their tail
- ✓ Cleaning their eyes
- ✓ Massaging their gums
- ✓ Stroking the length of their bodies and limbs including all the way to the end of their tail.

# GAME 8 - THE CONE GAME

## Concepts: Confidence, Flexibility, Optimism, Focus

This game builds optimism, promotes confidence and it also arms your dog with a crucial skill should they ever need to wear a muzzle, head collar, buster collar or harness.

To play this game all you need is a plastic cone or cup that your dog can fit their muzzle in - and you'll need some of their daily dinner!

In this game you reward your dog for any kind of interaction with the cone, remembering to throw food away and take the pressure off by rewarding your dog away from you/the cone.

You can then progressively become more specific about them getting closer and placing their nose in the cone as they become more confident in the game.

Once your dog has this behaviour down, you can switch the cone for all kinds of things.

THERE'S A GAME FOR THAT

# GAME 9 – KNOCK 'EM OVER

## Concepts: Confidence, GRIT, Flexibility, Optimism

One of the things we want to do when growing a confident and optimistic dog is empower them with GRIT and bravery to teach them that they have some level of control over things in their environment.

Take any object that you have at home, for example; an old plastic bottle and your game is to try to encourage your dog to knock it over, yes, you heard us, knock it over!

To progress with the game add some kibble or coins inside the bottle for some extra rattle, fill the bottle with some water so its trickier to knock over, stack items on top of each other - you can even set up a bunch of bottles and cans in a random pattern and scatter food around them for your dog to sniff out - this way, they are creating any noise in the game AND they are getting immediate rewards by eating the scattered food!

Get creative with the objects you use!

# GAME 10 - BOUNDARY GAMES

## Concepts: Calmness, Disengagement, Independence, Self Control

One of the most important strategies - and most requested learning EVER - is our super cool, super fun, Boundary Games!

Boundary Games are bed games that allow you to teach your dog to settle on a bed (or any surface really) and stay there until you release them.

Boundary games have numerous benefits. They promote and develop impulse control. They can help to balance and level out arousal as needed.

Boundary Games are bed games that allow you to teach your dog to settle on a bed (or any surface really) and stay there until you release them.

On a practical level they can help problem behaviours like counter surfing and jumping on visitors and they can help to improve recall and generally help to improve all basic behaviour and manners in many different places and environments.

# KEEP GROWING & PLAYING GAMES!

Wow. How amazing was all that learning! You are now armed with all the very best concepts, strategies and information to set your new rescue dog up for success and give them the absolute best life with you - a confident, optimistic and happy one!

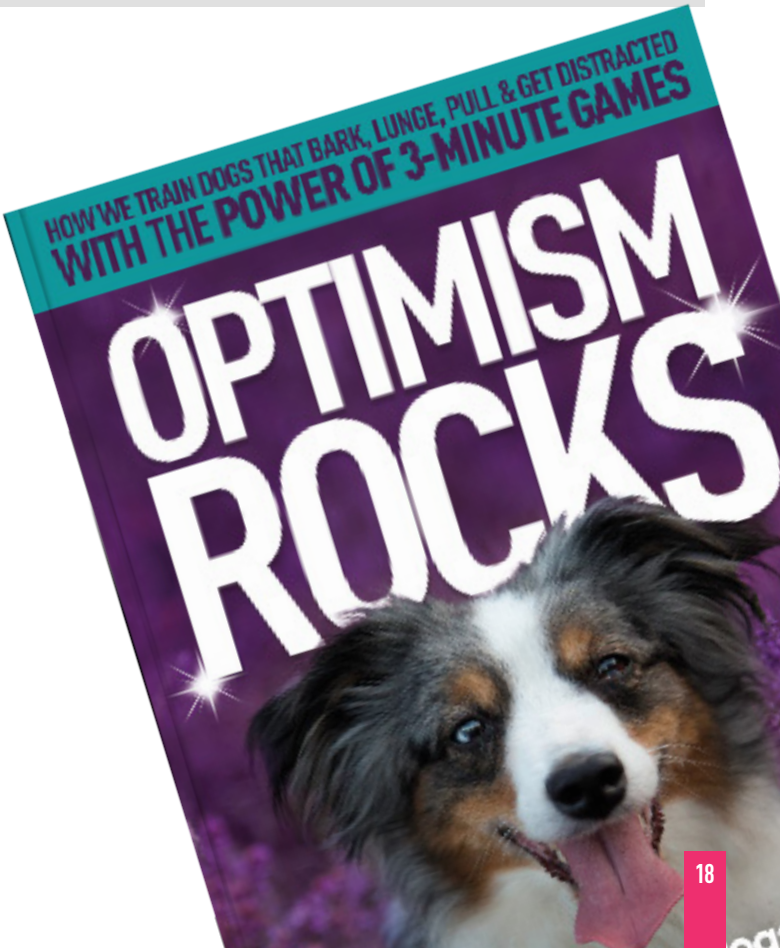
Building that super strong bond and relationship with your dog is in itself an optimism and confidence booster and the rewards have no limits. Keep playing games, keep making progress, keep moving your learning journey forward and remember - you are never done playing games!

We like to see dogs develop in their own individual ways so remember that when you are out there playing with your dog, pick the games that suit them best at that moment. It's always changing and there is no right and wrong game, just the right game for the dog in front of you at the time!

We know that you've got this..... grit, bravery, desire, passion, CONFIDENCE AND ABSOLUTE OPTIMISM - it's all in your grasp, at your fingertips, so seize the opportunity.

Are you a Gamechanger? Whatever your dog training struggle, there is ALWAYS a game for that!

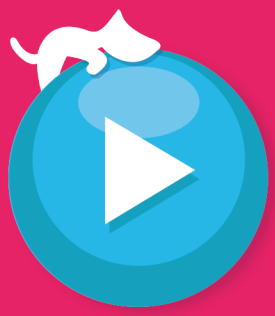
**Make sure you check out the Optimism Rocks eBook for more tips and strategies.**



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# RESOURCES

AbsoluteDogs is passionate about creating lifelong relationships between you and your dog through the power of concept training. To help dog owners such as yourselves, we also provide free access to:



## AbsoluteDogsTV YouTube Channel

Watch and subscribe now



## 'Sexier than a Squirrel' weekly podcast

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DOG TRAINING STRUGGLE?

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