



# happy tails dog training

*Happy dogs, Happy homes!*

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## Dog Play

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### Why is play between dogs important?

From early in life, dogs play. Puppies play with their littermates and learn not to bite too hard – a useful piece of knowledge for pet dogs – learning at a young age that teeth hurt. Dogs are social animals and enjoy play into adulthood. Play provides mental stimulation and social skills, as well as physical exercise. Allowing your adult dog to play at a well-run doggy daycare, a safe dog park, or supervised doggy play date, your dog's social skills will remain strong and your dog has the opportunity to enjoy being a dog.

### How do dogs play?

When dogs play with other dogs, they wrestle, chase, and play tug. During wrestle and chase games, there are play bows, quick taunts and freezes, running, rolling and jumping. Play includes barking, a bit of play growling or grumblings, and yips. Also, play may often *appear* like fighting due to the similar appearance of fighting behaviors. However, play is a controlled and well communicated set of behaviors and events. The play bow very often precedes a session of wrestling or chase. The more familiar dogs are with their playmates, the less obvious the bow may be.

### When has play gone too far?

Dogs can become overstimulated during play and take things too far. Similar to the overzealous sports fan, the fun moves into something more serious. When this occurs, the dogs need to take a short time out, allowing everyone to settle before play resumes.

Signs play needs to be broken up and the dogs' focus redirected:

- The hair along a dog's back stands up; this is a result of a chemical rush and means the dog is overstimulated. Watch for the dog(s) to shake as though they are wet, as this indicates they are "shaking off" that chemical rush in their bodies.
- Growling goes from a grumbling to a full, loud growl. The serious growl is very obvious when you hear it. Just like a parent telling a child "that's enough" in a tone that makes it clear a line has been crossed.
- Quick body freezes and fast stares become hard and last too long. Freezes and stares are usually a few seconds or less.
- A dog is being pinned and cannot get up. If the "pinned" dog immediately goes back to play after a brief time out, the dogs can continue to play but watch for too long of a pin down.

*If owners are ever uncertain about the play, they should end the session and consult a trainer or behaviorist to assess their dog's play style.*