

Help Dog Owners

Get Your Dog to Let Go of Your Sleeve, Shoes and Socks in 3 Steps



You reach for your shoes and your dog gets there first.

You pull your arm back and the dog pulls harder, growling happily, with your favourite jumper stretched between you.

You say no, you chase, you try to get the sock back, and somehow the whole thing gets worse every week.

Here is what most people miss. To your dog, this is a tug game, and tug needs two players.

When you pull back, you become the other end of the rope. When you chase, the sock becomes the best toy in the house.

Every yell and every grab tells the dog the game is working.

So the answer is to make letting go the better deal for your dog.

I believe any dog can learn to drop on one word, and these three steps show you how, starting today.

THE 3 STEPS

1

GO DEAD STILL THE SECOND TEETH TOUCH FABRIC

A tug game with no one pulling stops being fun.

The moment your dog grabs your sleeve, shoe or sock, let go of the item if you are holding it, stop moving, go quiet and lift your hands away.

Don't pull, don't chase and don't say no. Count about three seconds in your head before you do anything else.

This works because your pulling back is the fun part for your dog, so when you stop, the fun stops.

A dog trainer who coaches world champions gives the same

rule for the lead: don't pull your dog back to you, because the pulling is what pays.

Your sleeve works the same way.

Nobody remembers a plan in the heat of the moment, so decide it now.

Write this on the fridge with everyone's names on it: "If teeth touch fabric, I let go, go still and say drop once."

Studies of thousands of people show that a plan written as "if this, then I do that" makes people far more likely to actually do it.

Never pry the jaws open or yank the item out.

In one survey of dogs seen for behaviour problems, almost four in ten whose items were forced out of their mouths reacted aggressively.

You will know it is working when the grab gets shorter and the dog looks at you, puzzled, because the game has stopped being fun.



2

SAY “DROP” ONCE, THEN THROW FOOD AWAY FROM YOU

The word must come first, and the food must come every time.

Say “drop” once in a normal voice.

Then, about one second later, toss four to six small pieces of really tasty food, like chicken or cheese, on the floor two to four feet away, and point at them.

Your dog lets go to chase the food, which also puts space between those teeth and your hands.

The order matters more than anything else in this whole fix.
Say the word, then throw.

Throw the food one second after the word whether or not
your dog has let go yet.

That sounds backwards, but it is what makes the word
powerful, because the dog learns that “drop” always means
food is about to hit the floor.

The best time to teach this is when nothing is in the dog’s
mouth at all.

Do five minute sessions, three to five times a day: say “drop”,
throw the food, repeat.

Do it standing, sitting on the floor, carrying a bag, putting on
your coat, in different rooms.

Then move up slowly. After about ten to twelve good tries
with a boring toy, try a favourite toy, then a tug toy, then a
real sock. Over two or three weeks you work up to the stuff
your dog loves most.

You will know you are ready for real grabs when your dog’s
head snaps to the floor the instant you say the word, before
the food even leaves your hand.

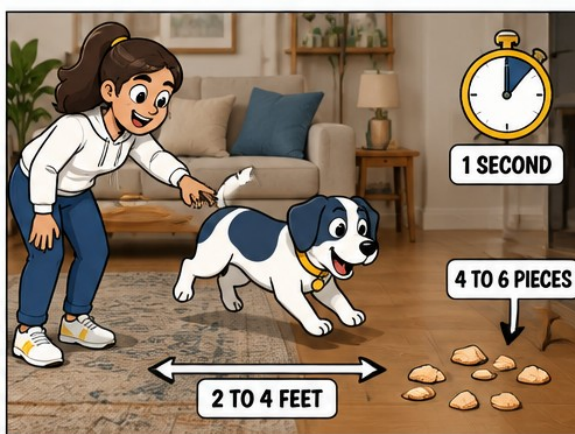
Time a few drops on your phone.

The goal is under a second in practice and one to three
seconds on a real sleeve grab, with no second “drop”.

SAY "DROP" ONCE, THEN ONE SECOND LATER THROW FOOD ON THE FLOOR EVERY SINGLE TIME



PRACTISE WHEN NOTHING IS IN YOUR DOG'S MOUTH BY SAYING "DROP" ONCE IN A NORMAL VOICE.



ABOUT ONE SECOND LATER, TOSS FOUR TO SIX TASTY PIECES TWO TO FOUR FEET AWAY AND POINT AT THEM, WHETHER OR NOT YOUR DOG HAS LET GO.



AFTER ABOUT TEN TO TWELVE GOOD TRIES WITH A BORING TOY, MOVE UP STEP BY STEP TO THE THINGS YOUR DOG LOVES MOST OVER TWO OR THREE WEEKS.



YOU ARE READY FOR REAL GRABS WHEN YOUR DOG LOOKS TO THE FLOOR UNDER A SECOND AFTER THE WORD, BEFORE THE FOOD EVEN LEAVES YOUR HAND.

3

PAY THE DROP, THEN GIVE IT BACK

A dog that knows it gets the toy back has no reason to hold on.

The second the item leaves the mouth, say "yes" and feed.

When your dog has finished the food, say "take it" and hand the toy back.

Most of the time, letting go should cost the dog nothing at all.

This is how you turn a fight into a trade.

A well known trainer taught her old dog to bring her pebbles

from the driveway and swap them for treats, because the dog learned that objects are money.

Your dog will let go happily once the swap feels generous.

With a shoe or sock that has to go away, swap in a tug toy your dog likes just as much before you put the item up high.

Then play tug with that toy on purpose every day, starting with “take it” and ending with “drop”.

That gives your dog a proper place to grab and lets you practise dozens of times a day.

Never reach for the sock while your dog is eating the food, because that is how a trade turns into guarding.

Keep one hand busy feeding while the other picks it up, or lay a little trail of treats a foot or two away and collect the item while the dog follows it.

You will know it is working when your dog drops the toy and looks up at you with a loose, wiggly body, waiting for the game to start again.

PAY YOUR DOG FOR LETTING GO, THEN GIVE THE TOY BACK, SO DROPPING FEELS LIKE A GOOD TRADE



THE SECOND THE TOY LEAVES YOUR DOG'S MOUTH, SAY "YES" AND GIVE IT A PIECE OF FOOD.



WHEN THE FOOD IS GONE, SAY "TAKE IT" AND HAND THE TOY BACK, SO LETTING GO COSTS YOUR DOG NOTHING.



NEVER GRAB THE SOCK WHILE YOUR DOG IS STILL EATING, BECAUSE THAT TURNS THE TRADE INTO GUARDING.



INSTEAD, LAY A SHORT TRAIL OF TREATS AWAY FROM THE SOCK, PICK IT UP WHILE YOUR DOG FOLLOWS IT, AND OFFER A TUG TOY IN ITS PLACE.

WHAT TO EXPECT, AND WHEN

In the first few days, the grabs will get shorter as soon as you stop pulling.

By the end of the first week of practice, most dogs look at the floor when they hear "drop".

Within two or three weeks you can usually use it on a real sleeve or sock.

If your puppy gets wilder in the evenings, the fix is usually more sleep, because puppies need 18 to 20 hours a day and a tired puppy grabs everything.

So plan a nap before the wild hour.

If six weeks of steady practice has not made a difference, find a reward based trainer.

And if your dog freezes, stares hard, growls or has bitten over an item, that is guarding, so stop trading for real items and get a qualified behaviour consultant, seeing the vet first if it started suddenly.

A swallowed sock needs the vet right away.

Follow Help Dog Owners for more simple fixes that make life with your dog calmer and happier.

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