

Teach Your Dog to Play Hide and Seek

By Steve Dale for *The Dog Daily*

The snow is falling; the temperature is dropping. The kids are indoors, the dog is indoors, and they're all going stir crazy.

Suzanne Clothier, author of *If A Dog's Prayers Were Answered Bones Would Rain from the Sky* (Warner Books), says what they all need is a fun game to play. "It's sometimes a challenge to figure out who needs to burn off energy more, the kids or the dog," says Clothier. "Sometimes it gets to the point where you know the weather is just too nasty out, but the dog begins to make mischief--and the kids are the same way. That's when a constructive outlet is really important."

One such outlet might be hide and seek. Begin teaching your Rover the game by having him sit in one place -- an adult may have to be there to ensure the sit-stay -- while your kid takes the dog's favorite toy or a treat and runs just a few feet away. Then the child says "Rover come!" Even dogs with pretty lousy recalls will run knowing there's a reward.

Repeat this exercise, and each time the kid with the treat or toy moves further from the dog. Eventually, the kid with the goodie goes off into another room while you (or another person) enforce the sit-stay until the hiding child says, "Rover come." At first the hiding person isn't hiding in really hard to find places, until you're sure that your dog gets the game. Once Rover understands how to play, there is no limit to where the kids can hide: in a bathtub, in a closet, under a bed, it doesn't matter. Clothier says she's hidden in a garbage bag and in a kitchen cupboard.

"This game is fun for everyone--dogs and kids," says Clothier, who lectures about canine behavior around the world. "It's also a great esteem builder for dogs, because they always win."

She's right about that. My nieces have played this game with my dogs, Lucy and Chaser, since they were all little girls. The dogs get paid when they find someone, sometimes with a treat or a toy, and they always get praise. So, I thought, if my nieces win because they've found somewhere to hide that the dogs can't find them, they too should be paid. I offered to pay them \$10 apiece if the dogs failed to sniff them out in 10 minutes. Of course, I knew darn well I'd never have to open my wallet. And I never did.

Clothier says, "Any dog can play--it really doesn't matter what the breed is. If you play with more than one dog, the dogs learn to work together as a pack." The sighthounds primarily search with their eyes, while scenthounds stick their nose to the ground and follow a trail of scent. Other dogs may follow a trail of scent in the air. Clothier doesn't play hide and seek too often with her entire pack of nine dogs. "Can you imagine what it's like to have nine dogs tearing through the house? It's not that I mind that so much; it's just that when nine dogs work together as a team, there's no challenge to it."

Indeed, Lucy and Chaser's best friend, Sophie, picked up on how to play just by following her buddies. In fact, we've had many dogs visit while our nieces played this game with Lucy and Chaser, and each and every pooch--including the girls' own dog--was a quick study. Our cat, Ricky, even caught on and he was faster than any dog; after all, he took short cuts leaping over sofas instead of running around them.

Clothier says she has never heard of a dog playing hide and seek and not enjoying the game. "It's a lot of fun if you happen to be a dog, or a little kid." –

A NOTE FROM KIM: REMEMBER the rules for a successful recall when playing this game. *Only call your dog's name ONCE.* Use noises to help dog to you after name. Throw a least a 30 second party when your dog finds you.