

Mine, Yours, Ours for Puppies and Adult Dogs by Maureen Ross, MA

What do we really own forever? We are attached to a lot of possessions that may or may not make us, or our dogs, feel good temporarily. Our dogs will be with us for as long as they can be. Given shorter lives, it is wise to be their best advocate, friend and teacher.

I enjoy spending time in a mutually respectful relationship with the dogs, where we take turns yielding to each other. Sometimes, it is fun to simply hang-out without rules. Look around. There is an overabundance of toys, equipment, food and clothing for our dogs. Is it true that it benefits the dog's well-being? Or is it to amuse and entertain the human? People love their dogs and the market-place knows it. It is a billion dollar industry. Turn-it-around and ask, "Is it true and necessary for you and your dog"?

I am as vulnerable as anyone else. Like a giddy kid, I have bought, tried and been given every leash, collar, cure-all and piece of equipment on the market. There is a photo in Awareness Centered Training of Gary, with a confused look on his face, is meaningful. He isn't alone. We have pointers, clickers, toys, collars and leashes in varying lengths and harnesses that promise to cure jumping and pulling. Some work, some do not. It depends!

Most of us enjoy playing with new gadgets. It gives us a choice. A toolbox needs tools. Dog training is no exception. When is enough, enough? Only we can decide. Like clearing the clutter from my closet, it is a relief when I clear the dog clutter from their closet too.

***Dogs are habitual creatures and learn through repetition,
conditioning and practice, just like us!
Making it fun teaching boundaries with games like Mine, Yours, Ours
creates a dog that enjoys learning.***

In *Object Exchange* I determine what the dogs love by asking, "do you like this or that?" Most of the times, they choose food over a toy, and one toy over another. No-one will ever convince me that dogs do not have favorite toys or enjoy opening new ones (novelty). Like a child who is given too many toys, all at once, they lose interest quickly too. If this is case for you, do an inventory of all their toys, and play object exchange. Which are the favorites? Choose three, throw the others out, or put them in a toy box. Better yet, create a game having your dog learn to put their own toys in the toy box. You can rotate them later on, "look, new toy!"

Oftentimes, their favorite toy ends up being something they've dragged in or a cut-off sweatshirt sleeve tied in knots. I swear they know when they have won something at a raffle, like that giant Alligator (Ally) that smells awful. Journey, our Newfie, won't let us toss it away. I have to "sneak" clean it. It is her special pacifier.

What I discovered that is fun for me and the dogs is a little game we play from puppy-hood into senior citizenship called ***Mine, Yours, Ours***. The benefit of this game is that it can be as simple or as challenging as you desire. It can be equally effective - interacting in human relationships too. It is easy to teach children how to play, "this is mine, this is yours, and we can play with this toy together".

Mine means —“**it is mine and leave-it.**” When our Newfie joined our family at 8 weeks old, we immediately began teaching her what was “**mine**” (meals, eating a yogurt, having a glass of wine or watching a movie in peace).

Yours is her toy, blanket, dog napper, healthy treats, yogurt (or meal) in her bowl. I have the dogs sit while I dole out carrots saying, “**mine**”, and I eat one, “**yours**”, and I give them one if they are sitting and “**ours**”, we all get one. Yippee—carrot party.

Remember habituation and generalization. Dogs get use to ways of being, doing and the environment. We all do. If we are consistent “enough” with **Mine, Yours, Ours**, they will be too. They quickly learn what the incentives are of “popcorn night”.

Ours is shared time and *this is your choice*. Shared time might be a game, walk, playing or again, popcorn night. Wednesday, as silly as it sounds, is “Eggy Day in the USA”. We all get scrambled eggs in the morning. Dogs are habitual, so I wish I could teach them how to scramble eggs because they are waiting by their diners waiting.

Will it get competitive with multiple dogs? Possibly, but it is no surprise that you must spend quality time alone and in groups, whether with dogs or multiple children. If you have five children, you aren’t going to spend all of your time with every one of them, every second, of very day. You arrange quality time to spend with each dog, puppy or child, even for five or ten minutes or as the need arises *and is prioritized*.

Quality time amounts to what you can give *without guilt*. Moments are as important as longer, boring training sessions. One minute is “good enough” for one **Mine, Yours, Ours** moment, teaching this slipper is “**mine**”, that stuffed toy is “**yours**”, and this ball is “**ours**”, “*let’s go play*”.

Instinctively (*will it enhance your dog’s natural behavior in a beneficial way*), and intuitively (*does it feel right for you*) integrate it as you interact with your dogs during daily living and learning. Be sure to pass this on to other family members and friends too. It is less confusing for dogs (and children) if adults are on the same page with boundaries, guidelines and good social behavior. Games, and life, have rules that need to be honored to learn, grow and interact successfully.

**Dogs become use to situations just as we do.
Transitions and lifestyle change not only for us but our dogs!**

What is your **Mine, Yours, Ours** time like with your dog? On a Friday or Saturday night, we enjoy a movie and tossing popcorn. That is the “our” night. The dogs, age appropriate, know it’s time to hit the dog nappers, it’s popcorn / movie night. Once they are settled, popcorn is tossed or placed. I say, “placed” because if you have an older dog and a younger dog, who might eat and dash to the older dog, have the older dog near to you, so you can “place” the treat and supervise the younger pooch.

If you have a new baby, and a dog who has been use to your undivided affection and attention, then common sense says that this transition may require new boundaries for dog, child and parents. Most dogs can learn to accept changes as long as they continue to receive some quality time and attention. Children and dogs require adult supervision and taught respect.

For a full version of **Mine, Yours, Ours - consider Awareness Centered Training – ACT**.