

# Out of Control Energy

There are times when your dog just isn't listening or seems to be "focused on outward things". These are natural situations where your dog has a misunderstanding of his position in the group. He thinks he is the boss and doesn't have to focus on you. This situation is easily corrected by letting your dog understand their appropriate position in your group.

You are the leader and he is the follower. Your responsibility is to keep him safe, healthy, and direct them. His responsibility is to obey your rules and be attentive to your commands.

This training module focuses on a less common, but still important situation with unfocused dogs. This discussion focuses on dogs that are not only unfocused, but uncontrollably energetic. This does not mean that they are dangerous, angry, or frightened. This is a situation where your dog has an unusually high amount of pent up, adrenalized energy.

You may experience this in situations when:

- You come home and your dog will go crazy and not calm down after a period of time.
- There may be times where the family is home and your dog starts running all over the place and doesn't listen to anyone. This will go on for a long period of time.
- When you come home, the place might look like a tornado went through the inside of your house.
- As soon as you engage your dog or ask him to do something, he quickly adrenalizes and misbehaves.
- This may not be a "behavior thing", but an "exercise thing". Just like our grade school had recess for us to get out and just "let loose"; dogs need that time too. They need to run, play, socialize, explore, and "just go nuts". They need a time where they are just "let off the leash" and allowed to "go for it". This allows their adrenaline to drain and will return them to a situation where they can focus on you.

So, how do we create this "recess" for our dogs? We have three suggestions that have been very successful for our clients:

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## **DOGGIE DAY CARE:**

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This is an excellent solution if you don't have the time to create the "recess event" yourself. These are facilities where you can take your dog for the day and they will be looked after by pet professionals. There will be many other dogs there for your dog to interact and play with. Through the management and direction of the pet professionals, your dog will be placed in a group of dogs that are the same size and general temperament as yours.

Simply put, your dog is placed in an environment where he can safely play and go nuts with other dogs in a socialized setting that he naturally understands. This creates a situation where he can release his physical energy and develop social structure. He will feel safe and just be a happy dog.

Since you are the one dropping him off and picking him up, he will see you as the one responsible for this wonderful, social, physical, and learning experience. This helps build your leadership position in his eyes. When you bring him home, he is now physically relaxed and ready to respectfully focus on your direction and rules.

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Your first role in this process is to find the appropriate Doggie Day Care. You must physically visit each facility. A few guidelines we have provided our clients are:

- Dogs should be separated by size, physical stamina, and temperament.
- The facilities should be clean. The first warning sign that it isn't clean is if you walk in and "it smells like a kennel".
- There should be staff stationed at all locations where there are dogs or dog activity.
- There should be a large outside play area with proper supervision. If they allow more than one type of "dog group" (i.e. big dog vs. small dog) into the outside play area at a time, there should be fences separating the groups.
- There should also be an inside play area where the dogs can play in inclement weather.
- The crates should be large, clean, and free of rust & mold.
- You should never see them hurting or being overly physical with any dog.
- We highly recommend that they have cameras throughout the facility to assist in their management of the dogs and of their employees. You should also be allowed access to these cameras so you can "check up on things".
- It is important that you do your research on the facility via social media, but your gut will always give you the best answer.

A good Doggie Day Care will not blindly accept your dog. They will normally perform a temperament evaluation to see if "he fits". They will want to make sure that he is not aggressively dangerous and has the social ability to be with other dogs. This first "little test" normally lasts about an hour. You are present with the pet professionals as they perform a quick visual evaluation of his temperament. They will then determine which of their current dogs he would most likely "want to be friends with". They will normally put him in a situation where they slowly add "new friends" one at a time and observe his reactions.

If all goes well with his initial test, the Doggie Day Care staff will recommend a one day trial. This is like the equivalent of when our mommy brought us to the first day of Kindergarten and left us with the teacher and other children. We bring our dog for a Doggie Day Care session and remain for a bit. He can still see us as he is observing the other dogs and how much fun they are having. He is slowly introduced into his Doggie Day Care Program as we slowly move out of the picture.

We suggest taking your dog to Doggie Day Care at least two to three times a week. If you can take him more days, that would be even better. We suggest that you take him on the same days of the week. Since most other dog owners take their dogs on the same days, this means that your dog will have a higher possibility of interacting with the same dogs. This will help create "doggie friends" and provide your dog with a higher sense of safety when at the Doggie Day Care.

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## OFF LEASH PLAY:

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I use the term "off leash" because releasing your dog's adrenaline is not accomplished with a walk around the neighborhood. Think of high school and gym class. If the coach told you to walk around the track, that would not tire you out. If he told you to run the 440 dash, that would tire you out. You need to release your dog's adrenaline through heightened activity. Your dog needs to "huff and puff".

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This is best accomplished if you have a large, fenced-in back yard. Let your dog in the yard and become very animated. Wave your hands or even jump up and down. Get a stick or ball and throw it while you are pointing for him to go get it. This doesn't have to be a game of fetch. You can have five or six balls and sticks. Every time he goes to the item you just threw, become animated again to get his attention. Then throw the next item while you are walking over to pick up the one you just threw. I suggest having multiple items so you can be throwing them as quickly as possible. This will constantly provide him with a new, unique target that will require a high amount of energy to engage.

You can also create a "scavenger hunt" that serves the same purpose as the "get-it, get-it, get-it" game we just reviewed. Go outside by yourself and hide his favorite toys or goodies around the yard. They can be placed in relatively "plain sight" because you want him to find them. Let him out and become very animated. Start loudly asking "Where is the toy?" and quickly move (acting somewhat crazy) over to the first scavenger item. Point to it and say "There it is, there it is, there it is!". As soon as he gets it, let him be nuts with it for a moment. Now, quickly move to the next item in a crazy way and repeat the process. This is will also be great exercise for you!

If you have more than one dog and the other dog likes to play with your "out of control dog", let them out together. They will often go nuts together because of the excitement of being outside and "free". You can use the "get it, get-it, get-it" or "scavenger hunt" games with both of them to help kick start their combined adrenaline.

Continue to engage with them until you see them come to the back door or back porch and just lie down. If your encouraging them to get up and play is returned with "let me chill" looks, you have accomplished your goal.

What if you don't have a large, fenced-in back yard? If you live in a community with a fenced tennis court or other enclosed area, you could get permission and use those areas. You could also create a "virtual play area".

Get a fifty or sixty foot training lead and find an open area that is at least twice as wide as your lead. Get a stake and place it in the middle of the area. Put a harness on your dog, attach the lead to the harness, and attach the other end to the stake in the middle of the area. You can now perform the same exercises that we mentioned above. You can never require your dog to engage farther than the length of the training lead. Don't throw the ball or hide stuff "outside the perimeter".

Also, do not create this "virtual play area" in a busy or overly traveled location. You want to keep the distractions within the perimeter so that you will keep control of the events.

***Trainer's Safety Note:*** *Keep small children away when you are actively engaging in "high energy" activities with your dog. Small children and jumping/running dogs often lead to bad outcomes. Your small children can play with your dog when things are calm.*

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## **PLAY WITH NEIGHBOR DOGS:**

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This is a great solution if your dog has "doggie friends" in the neighborhood. Either you or your neighbor must have a large, enclosed back yard. Both dogs should already know each other and be

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friends. This means that they have successfully played off leash before or they calmly meet on walks on a regular basis. If they have only met on walks, I recommend that that they are about the same size.

Let's say that you are taking your dog to your neighbor for a back yard "play date". Bring him on a leash to the front of the house. Next, bring the neighbor dog out on a leash and let them calmly meet. If they get a little crazy, walk them around for a moment and bring them back together. Once they are calm, walk both of them to the gate to the back yard. (I would suggest going through the gate and not through the house.)

Open the gate and calmly walk each dog through to the other side. Close the back gate and then release them with the leashes still attached. I want you to leave the leashes on for a few moments just in case they get "too excited" and get into a fight. This is possibly something new to them and you still need to have the ability to maintain control.

You can play the "get it, get it, get it" or the "scavenger hunt" games with them. You can also let them just be "two dogs in the back yard". They may run around together, calmly walk and check each other out, or possibly ignore each other. If they are staying calm or ignoring each other, allow them to maintain this posture for a while. You will eventually want them to "ramp it up" to drain the adrenaline.

So, when do you remove the leashes? This normally happens after a few minutes. As you have more and more play dates, you will probably release the leashes as soon as you let them in the back yard and close the gate. As soon as you see that there is no sign of aggression or fear, that is the time to remove the leashes.

If possible, let them play and "be two dogs in the back yard" until you see them lie down together, exhausted. You should try several times to see if they will get up and run around again. If they give you those "leave me alone" eyes, they are pretty much spent. You have accomplished your goal of draining all the adrenaline out of your out of control doggie.

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