

Easy Tips
for

Bonding with
Your Dog



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A Note to the Reader:

This report is intended as a reference only. The ideas presented here are for the purpose of helping dog owners find ways to bond with their dogs. Please exercise caution with any activity in which you and your dog engage, and consider your dog's health before beginning any strenuous activity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Bonding with Your Dog – It Can Happen At Any Age	4
Chapter 2: Your Personality and Actions Around Your Dog	6
Chapter 3: Training	7
Chapter 4: Spend Quality Time with Your Dog	8
Chapter 5: Set a Routine and Stick to It	10
Chapter 6: Find a Helpful Job for Your Dog	11
Chapter 7: Safety	13
Chapter 8: Pet Your Dog	15
Chapter 10: Take a Walk	17
Chapter 11: Take Your Dog on Vacation	18
Chapter 12: Play Games	19
Chapter 13: It's Your Turn to Have Fun with Your Dog!	22
Appendix 1: Main Points in Bonding with Your Dog	23
Appendix 2: Helpful Links	24

CHAPTER 1

Bonding with Your Dog – It Can Happen At Any Age

It doesn't matter when your dog comes to live with you – as a puppy or an older rescue; it's never too late to form that special bond with your dog. Bonding occurs and improves in times when you and your dog focus on one another; the more time you consistently invest in your dog, the stronger the bond.

As far as your dog is concerned, bonding is truly about trust, and the more your dog learns he can rely on you, the more he trusts you. Trust is what ultimately creates the bond. Positive experiences, time, attention, love, training, and consistency all help to create the trust, forming a caring and loving relationship with your dog.

Bonding takes time, effort, and patience, but it's well worth the effort. Your dog will develop strong self confidence, and that will help him to be more relaxed and stress free. Since he trusts you, he will also be more inclined to do what you ask of him, and will be more socialized around other dogs and strangers. Your dog's trust and love for you, and his confidence in you will present itself in everything he does.

If you have more than one dog in your household, the bond with each dog will be unique. You should spend one-on-one time with every dog so you can tighten the bond with each one. The same is true with members of your household; the bond with each family member and your dog(s) will

be unique. Hopefully all members of your family will spend quality alone time with your dog(s) to improve that bond.

Some of the ideas for bonding presented in this report are common sense and should be part of your regular life with your dog, while others may seem a bit far-fetched. Choose ideas that resonate with you and those you think you and your dog will enjoy. Make sure some of your bonding activities include time away from your home. This will help build your dog's confidence. The idea is to make your dog a real member of your family. And, in doing so, you'll enrich your life in immeasurable ways.

CHAPTER 2

Your Personality and Actions Around Your Dog

This may not seem like a way to bond with your dog, after all, it's not an activity, but your personality and the way you interact can either enhance or detract from the bond you have with your dog. You can strengthen your bond by being the "kind and benevolent" leader, remaining calm, patient, and consistent in all your interactions.

When your dog first comes to live with you, either as a puppy or an older dog, the key is to remain calm, patient yet firm, clear and consistent, and non-confrontational. Allow your new dog time to adjust to his new surroundings. Try not to "fawn" all over your new dog, no matter how cute he is. He will also probably make mistakes when he comes to live with you; you need to keep your temper in check when these mistakes happen. If you get angry, it's likely your dog will become afraid of you. Instead, talk to your dog calmly and explain why he should not have done what he did. I know that may sound silly, but it works!

Because dogs are basically pack animals, they look to humans to provide leadership. It's up to you to be the kind of leader your dog needs. Confidence and consistency in your interaction with your dog reinforces your dog's own sense of confidence and place within your family. And in turn, these actions will help your dog grow to his full potential. Finally, an important aspect of building the bond is to show your dog regular affection.

CHAPTER 3

Training

Does your dog need some training? Most dogs can benefit from training, no matter the age. Training of some sort should be ongoing throughout your dog's life. Training works to stimulate your dog's mind, keeping him sharp. Training will also help your dog become a well-mannered member of your household. Ultimately, the right training will also show your dog you're a kind but strong leader of the family "pack," giving your dog the comfort to know his needs are taken care of.

It's important to make your training sessions a positive experience for both of you. Always let your dog know when he's done something right. Some ways you can do this are by telling him what a good boy he is, petting him, or by giving him a treat. If you don't have experience training your dog, get some help.

Training is an enormous subject that's full of opinions on the right or wrong way to train. It's my opinion that training shouldn't involve the use of choke or prong collars, because that's not really showing your dog how to work as a team; instead it shows your dog that you can only control him through the use of these devices. The most important thing is to do your research and find a trainer that uses only positive reinforcement to encourage your dog to willingly cooperate with you. Only then will you create the type of loving bond you are seeking.

CHAPTER 4

Spend Quality Time with Your Dog

When you spend quality time with your dog, you commit yourself to participating in activities that your dog looks forward to. Not just one-sided, these can also be activities you enjoy as well! Quality time can be as simple as watching TV or reading a book while you rub your dog as he lies beside you on the couch. It can be going for a car ride, a walk, or outdoor shopping together. Or, it can mean something more intense such as training for the show ring or other types of competitive events. Whatever you choose to do, spending quality time is one of the best ways to strengthen your bond.

Because most of us lead busy lives, spending time with our dog often gets put on the “back burner.” We believe if we can’t devote a large amount of time to our dog there’s no point in spending any time at all. That’s not true. Believe it or not, your dog can thrive on 20 minutes or so of your daily focused attention! All you have to do is make the commitment to spend that amount of time, regularly, every day!

Spending quality time may mean finding moments each day to dote on your dog, even if it’s 10 minutes here, 10 minutes there. An ideal time to spend a few special moments is just before bedtime. Rubbing, lightly massaging, or petting your dog before bedtime is a good stress reliever for you while increasing the bond.

My dog Yankee and I have several daily activities we enjoy together. We walk together almost every morning. As we're walking, he looks up at me as if to say "thanks – I'm having a great time doing this with you!" We sit together in my sunroom – he lies beside me on my wicker couch, and I rub him while I'm reading a magazine or a book. First thing in the morning, he jumps into bed with my husband and me, and asks for a belly rub. It's a great way to start the day!

Spending quality time can also involve planning regular weekend activities for you and your dog. Activities such as a hike, a camping trip, a weekend getaway, a visit to a dog friendly lake, a beach, and so on become special times shared with your dog. The idea is to find what works for you and your dog and consistently do it.

CHAPTER 5

Set a Routine and Stick to It

Dogs thrive on routine and consistency. One of my morning routines with Yankee is a late morning tennis ball session. We go to the local play area, and I kick a tennis ball for him to chase, catch, and bring back to me. He eagerly looks forward to these daily treats, and knows what time we should be going. If I get otherwise pre-occupied, he is there to remind me of what I should be doing instead of checking my email!

The routine is really important. Dogs set their “clocks” by their human’s routine. They know when we should get up every day, they know when breakfast and dinner should be served, and will remind you if you’re late. They also know if they should get a morning walk, and when you come and go from the house. Deviate from the routine all the time, and your dog gets stressed. Stick to the routine, spend quality time, and the bond strengthens.

CHAPTER 6

Find a Helpful Job for Your Dog

Most dogs were originally bred to perform some type of job, and now many of these breeds are mainly pets. Even though they're pets, they still have the instinct to perform a job. In knowing this, you can increase the bond with your dog, improve his mind, and relieve boredom, all by finding a helpful household job for your dog.

Dogs love to feel like they're contributing to the household, so it's important to find a household job that suits your dog. For example, it may not seem like much, but when my dog Yankee (a golden retriever) and I go out for his morning potty walk, he grabs the newspaper to bring it in. A job he loves. It doesn't hurt that he gets lots of praise and a treat, but it's an important part of our morning routine.

Whenever I go to the grocery store, Yankee is there to help carry packages from the car to the kitchen. Another job he loves. He's always available and more than willing to carry anything from anywhere in order to help. For him, I believe it's about being with us, and being an active participant in the family. He takes great pride in helping me do something, plus it boosts his confidence.

What does your dog like to do? How do you think he can help in the household? Is he protective? If so, let him know his job is to guard the home while you're away. Does he like to retrieve? Is he a scent hound who

enjoys using his abilities to find things? Does he like more complicated tasks – those that require thought? Is he a hunter?

Get in tune with the activities your dog enjoys and find the job or jobs that suit him. Look at his breed (or predominant breed if he's a mix) and that will give you a basis for determining a job that he will like. Then train him in those jobs, but don't let breed limit you in the choice of job. I've known some retrievers who didn't want to retrieve and some guard dogs who couldn't or didn't want to guard anything. Part of the bonding process is to find the job that fits your dog based on his personality and what he likes, not what he should be suited for based on breed.

So, have a look around your home, think about your life and your routine, and determine how and where your dog can help you best. Find that job your dog will love and he will love you for it!

CHAPTER 7

Safety

Your dog needs to feel safe, and only you can provide him with this feeling of safety. When a dog feels safe and secure, this naturally increases the bond with you. It also reduces his stress, which in turn, helps to keep him healthy.

To ensure your dog feels safe and secure, it's best to keep him inside and with you as much as possible. Dogs are social animals and thrive on companionship. If you have a back yard where your dog can play, make sure the fencing is secure. Dog-proof your home and yard, so there's nothing dangerous he can get in to.

Don't allow anyone to tease or otherwise mishandle your dog. Know how you want your dog to be treated and expect any guests to your home to treat your dog accordingly. If a problem occurs that you can't correct, remove your dog from the situation. Put him somewhere else in the house where he won't feel threatened.

Never let your dog roam free, and always make sure he has some type of identification, such as a microchip, a collar with identification, or a collar with tags, in case he accidentally gets out.

Give your dog a place in the house to go, such as a crate or a bed; a place he knows is his. This becomes his "safe place" where he can go if anything ever frightens him. Not all dogs need a place to go, but many do.

If your dog has noise or other phobias, a safe place may be just the answer to soothe his anxiety. Make sure your dog knows he's safe – increase the bond. It's that simple.

CHAPTER 8

Pet Your Dog

Regularly petting your dog for even a few minutes every day is a great way to improve the bond with your dog. It's also one of the easiest ways to improve the bond. Just like with people, being touched has a powerful emotional effect on dogs. Touching your dog soothes and calms him, and makes him feel connected to you.

If you have a new dog in your home, it's important to get him used to the idea of touch as quickly as possible. Ideally, you want to be able to touch your dog's entire body, including his paws. You also want others, such as veterinarians and groomers to be able to easily touch and handle your dog. The more you accustom your dog to human touch, the easier it will be for others to handle your dog. And in an emergency situation, this can be critical.

To get your new dog used to being touched, start with a short petting session each day, for only a couple of minutes at a time. Make sure these sessions occur at a time that's good for you. You don't want to calmly pet your dog while the kids are running around the house, or you're stressed from the day's activities. You need to be in a relaxed state. Depending on the size of your dog, you can sit down on the floor next to your dog, put him on your lap, or have him on the furniture beside you. Gently and slowly stroke his head and his back, while softly saying his name and telling him what a good boy he is and how much you love him.

Do this simple routine every day, and watch how your dog will come to love this time spent together.

Once your dog becomes used to basic touch, begin doing things like scratching his head, and rubbing his face, belly and chest. The idea is to be able to effortlessly touch any area of your dog's body, especially his paws.

As an author of two books on massage for dogs and a canine wellness practitioner who regularly massages dogs, I'm often asked if there is a difference between petting and massaging your dog. The answer is Yes! Massage is not the same as petting. When massaging your pet, your intention is to affect the animal's health and well-being, using deliberate, controlled, and focused strokes. Your purpose is multifold; to help heal, to increase the bond with your animal, to give back to a beloved friend, and most important, to be aware of your dog's body so changes and potential problems can be detected early.

Massage consists of several types of strokes that can be applied in varying rates, pressures, directions, etc. If you are interested in learning these strokes for your dog, buy a good book or find a local class. You can find my books by searching "Sherri Cappabianca" at Amazon.com, [Barnes and Nobel.com](http://BarnesandNobel.com), or Books-A-Million.com.

CHAPTER 9

Take a Walk

While taking your dog for a walk may seem obvious, let's think about how we can make your walk a better experience for both you and your dog. Many times when people walk their dog, they view it as a chore that must be done every day, similar to cooking dinner, cleaning up the kitchen, or other similar activities. Even if they don't view it as a chore, they don't think of it as a pleasurable and shared experience with their dog. There's often no interaction with their furry friend.

Let's change that. Just like other memorable occasions, time spent with your dog is special. So when you're on your walk, focus on your dog. Talk to him as you walk. Let your dog stop and sniff the great dog smells. Take pleasure in the scenery and in being outside with your dog. Remember that it's important to relax and enjoy the time you spend with your dog.

How do you know that your dog is walking "with you?" A dog that is walking with you is one that "checks in" during your walk. Does your dog occasionally look up at you while you're walking? If so, he's participating in the walk with you. It's a shared experience and should be enjoyable for both you and your dog.

CHAPTER 10

Take Your Dog on Vacation

When you plan your vacations, do you include your canine companion in those plans? I often do. One of my favorite places is Captiva Island, located in southwest Florida. It also happens to be very dog friendly. It was one of my late dog Rocky's favorite places on earth, so much so, that my husband and I spread some of his ashes in the water there. We also took Rocky to the North Carolina Mountains where we would go hiking, and to the beaches of North and South Carolina. He loved going on vacation with us.

Our current dog Yankee (Rocky's nephew) likes Captiva as well, although we haven't been there enough for him to truly develop the same passion for the place. Yankee is only 3 years old and so far he's accompanied us on several Florida beach vacations.

I read with interest recently about camps in Vermont and the Lake Tahoe area that cater to people that want to vacation with their dogs. These camps provide all sorts of activities that involve your dog. In Vermont, the camp is called [Camp Gone to The Dogs](#) and the camp in Lake Tahoe is called [Camp Winnaribbun](#) (see the appendix for URLs). Doesn't that sound like fun?

What about you? What is it that you love to do where you can take your dog along? Think about it and plan a vacation for the entire family, including your dog. You'll find you'll all have a great time!

CHAPTER 11

Play Games

Most dogs love to play games, even when they get older. Playing games with your dog, whether indoor or outdoor can give you both good exercise and provide mental stimulation for your dog. The games listed in this section and the next are by no means inclusive, they're just meant to give you some ideas.

Probably the most common game you can play with your dog is fetch. Fetch can be played using a ball, a Frisbee, a stick, or any other object that can't become a choking hazard. There are many dogs who want to play fetch all day, while others will be entertained only for a short while. To start your dog playing fetch, ask him to sit, then throw the object, and tell your dog to "go get it" with excitement in your voice. Your dog should retrieve the object and bring it back to you to throw again. A variation on fetch is to try to outrun your dog to the object you've just thrown. This variation stimulates your dog's competitive nature, and encourages him to get to the object quickly. It also works better as a game if your dog isn't inclined to bring the object back! If you have a pool or live near a safe body of water, throw a ball or Frisbee into the water. Your dog can either swim for it, or catch the ball in the air before it hits the water.

Since I don't like to throw a wet and dirty tennis ball and I can't throw it that far anyway, I play a different variation of fetch with my dog Yankee. I kick the tennis ball, much like we're playing soccer. He tries to stop it, but when it gets by him, he chases it and brings it back. He eagerly

and intently watches my foot as I get ready to kick the ball, in an attempt to anticipate in which direction the ball will fly. Often, after sizing up the location of the ball and my foot, he'll start out running in a direction ahead of the kick to get a head start on the ball. He will play this game for hours if I let him, he enjoys it that much.

Another very common game is tug-of-war. Most dogs love this game – it brings out their predatory drive. It's mentally and physically stimulating for your dog and can give you some fun and exercise too. I know there's controversy surrounding the game because some people believe it leads to aggressive behaviors. While I've never seen that happen, it's possible that it can, unless some basic rules are followed.

- The most important rule in playing tug-of-war is to teach your dog a release command, such as "drop it." This way, you can end the game should you need to.
- Always use a toy designed for playing tug-of-war, one that gives you both an end to pull on, and keeps your hand away from your dog's mouth.
- Play in an area where you have space and room to move around, with no dangerous objects in the way.
- It's OK if your dog gets excited while playing tug-of-war, but be sure not to let the game get out of hand. If it does, stop the game until your dog calms down.
- Stop the game immediately if you accidentally get bit.
- Despite some beliefs to the contrary, you can let your dog win the game, but only as long as he is behaving appropriately. Any inappropriate behavior should result in the game being stopped immediately.

A final fun game is “hide the toy.” I play this game with my dog using one of his favorite toys (or sometimes a treat). Show your dog the toy he’s supposed to find, let him sniff it, and then ask him to sit while you go hide the toy. Your dog should remain sitting in the room where you left him until you return from hiding the toy. Give him the command “find it” and off he goes looking from room to room until he finds the toy. I always follow my dog as he searches, telling him to “find it” to encourage his search. Once he finds the toy, I give him lots of praise. My dogs have all loved this game. It’s great fun, mentally challenging, and works on reinforcing the sit/stay command.

With these suggestions, use your imagination to create new games or to change the game to suit your dog. The most important thing is to have fun, get some exercise for your dog (and maybe you too!) and enjoy the time you are spending with your dog.

CHAPTER 12

It's Your Turn to Have Fun with Your Dog!

There are lots of ways you can spend time with your dog and increase your bond. This report has given you several suggestions; incorporate as many of them as you can. Look at your lifestyle, your activities, and your interests to figure out ways to include your dog in whatever you do. Use your imagination to alter the activities to make them more interesting for both you and your dog. In doing so, you will be amazed at the increased connection you have with your dog.

One of my favorite quotes is *"He is your friend, your partner, your defender, your dog. You are his life, his love, his leader. He will be yours, faithful and true, to the last beat of his heart. You owe it to him to be worthy of such devotion."* In bonding with your dog, you will be worthy of that devotion.

Appendix 1

Main Points in Bonding with Your Dog

- Bonding takes time, effort, and patience.
- Ensure all members of your family spend one-on-one time with each dog in your family.
- Be a confident and consistent leader; if your dog makes a mistake, calmly explain what he did and why he shouldn't do it again.
- Training is of life-long benefit. Use only positive reinforcement, with no prong or choke collars to force your dog into obedience.
- Spend daily focused, quality time with your dog, even if it's as little as 20 minutes a day.
- Set up a routine and stick to it. Dogs thrive on consistency and routine.
- Find a helpful job for your dog. Dogs love to feel they are contributing. Never allow anyone to tease or mishandle your dog.
- Never let your dog roam free, and always make sure he has some type of identification.
- Give your dog a safe place to go should he become frightened.
- Regularly pet your dog to get him used to touch, especially the paws.
- Take a walk with your dog and focus on your dog as you walk.
- Plan a vacation that includes your dog.
- Play games.

For updates to this report, new reports, and other ideas, please visit [Rocky's Retreat](#). Also, visit our blog, [Rocky's Viewpoint](#), where we will be talking about our opinions and experience with a wide variety of topics, some fun and some serious.

Appendix 2

Helpful Links

www.rockysretreat.com – Rocky's Retreat website.

www.rockysviewpoint.com – Rocky's Retreat blog.

www.offtheleashpress.com – Off The Leash Press website. Publisher of books that make a positive difference in your animal's life.

www.healthydogsyourlovingtouch.com – press kit site for my first book "Healthy Dogs, Your Loving Touch: Acupressure Massage for Your Dog."

www.amazon.com – Amazon website.

www.barnesandnoble.com – Barnes and Nobel website.

www.booksamillion.com – Books-A-Million website.

<http://www.campgonetothedogs.com> – Camp Gone to the Dogs, a camp in Vermont where you can vacation with your dog.

<http://www.campw.com> – Camp Winnaribbun, located in Lake Tahoe, NV, where you and your dog can vacation, participate in a variety of dog friendly activities.