

# 7 Retrieving Games That Calm Excitable Retrievers

## Introduction

Many retrievers are energetic, enthusiastic and eager to be active. These qualities are part of what makes them such enjoyable companions, but they can also lead to behaviours such as over-excitement, constant chasing, or difficulty settling.

These behaviours are not usually the result of disobedience. More often, they reflect natural instincts that have not yet been given a clear and constructive outlet.

Retrievers were developed to search, retrieve and work in close partnership with people. When these instincts are understood and used in a structured way, they can help form the foundation of a calm, responsive companion dog.

The exercises in this guide are intended as a simple starting point. They are not complex, and they do not require specialist equipment. Their purpose is to help you begin working with your dog's natural abilities in a calm and thoughtful way.

## Before You Begin

A few simple guidelines will help you make the most of these exercises:

- Keep sessions short and manageable
- Begin in a quiet environment with few distractions
- Focus on calmness rather than speed
- Allow your dog time to think and respond
- End each session while your dog is still engaged

The aim is not simply to exercise your dog, but to encourage attention, self-control and cooperation.

# 1. Calm Before the Retrieve

**Purpose:**

To encourage calmness before activity and reduce impulsive behaviour.

**How to begin:**

Ask your dog to sit beside you. Hold a dummy or toy where your dog can see it, but do not throw it immediately.

Wait quietly for a moment of calm before moving on. This may be brief at first.

**Progression:**

Gradually increase the length of time your dog remains calm before being sent to retrieve.

**Key idea:**

Calmness before action is the foundation of controlled behaviour.

# 2. Short, Controlled Retrieves

**Purpose:**

To introduce retrieving in a calm and structured way.

**How to begin:**

Gently throw a dummy a short distance.

Pause briefly before sending your dog, then encourage a steady return.

**Progression:**

Increase distance gradually, while maintaining calmness and control.

**Key idea:**

Retrieving should be thoughtful and controlled, rather than hurried or repetitive.

# 3. Returning to Hand

**Purpose:**

To develop cooperation and a complete retrieve.

**How to begin:**

When your dog returns with the object, encourage them to come close and remain with you.

Reward calm behaviour and a willingness to stay with you.

**Progression:**

Gradually shape a calm and reliable delivery to hand.

**Key idea:**

The retrieve is complete when the dog returns calmly and remains with the handler.

## 4. One Retrieve, Then Pause

**Purpose:**

To reduce over-excitement and prevent repetitive chasing.

**How to begin:**

Carry out a single retrieve, then pause before repeating the exercise.

Allow your dog time to settle.

**Progression:**

Introduce slightly longer pauses between retrieves.

**Key idea:**

Fewer, more thoughtful retrieves often lead to greater calmness and focus.

## 5. Simple Memory Retrieves

**Purpose:**

To encourage concentration and mental engagement.

**How to begin:**

Allow your dog to watch as you place a dummy a short distance away.

Walk back together, pause briefly, then send your dog to retrieve.

**Progression:**

Increase the distance or introduce a short delay before sending.

**Key idea:**

Remembering and thinking are calming activities for many retrievers.

## 6. Gentle Hunting Exercise

**Purpose:**

To make use of your dog's natural searching instinct.

**How to begin:**

Place a dummy in light cover while your dog watches.

Encourage your dog to search for it in a calm and methodical way.

**Progression:**

Gradually move towards placing the dummy out of sight.

**Key idea:**

Searching is often more satisfying and calming than repeated throwing.

## 7. Finishing Calmly

**Purpose:**

To reinforce calm behaviour at the end of activity.

**How to begin:**

After a short session, return to a calm activity such as quiet walking or standing together.

Avoid ending on a high level of excitement.

**Progression:**

Make calm endings a consistent part of every session.

**Key idea:**

The way an activity ends has a strong influence on overall behaviour.

## Bringing It Together

These exercises are intended to be simple and practical.

Used regularly, even in short sessions, they can begin to:

- channel energy into purposeful activity
- develop calmness and self-control
- improve focus and responsiveness

- strengthen the relationship between dog and owner

Progress is usually gradual, but consistent, thoughtful practice often leads to noticeable improvement over time.

## **Next Steps**

If you have found these exercises helpful, you may wish to explore the approach further.

You can do this by:

- reading the articles on the Calm Canine Companion blog
- following the structured pathway in the Calm Canine Companion series
- joining The Calm Retriever Club for ongoing guidance and support

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