Is it play or a fight?

Play is practice for real life: chasing, wrestling, even fighting and courtship. That's why it can look rough, loud and a little alarming, even when both dogs are having a blast.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Healthy play is **loose, bouncy and takes turns.** Dogs switch games, trade roles and take quick breaks. If one dog keeps trying to leave, hide or get away, it isn't play for that dog anymore.

Signs of good play: think MARS

M — Meta-signals
Play bows, bouncy moves and goofy faces that say "just kidding."

A — Activity shifts
They switch games: chase, wrestle, flirt, then chase again.

R — Role reversals
They take turns. The chaser gets chased, and top dog ends up on the bottom.

S — Self-handicapping
The bigger or stronger dog tones it down to keep the game fair.

Also look for: loose, wiggly bodies · quick pauses (a shake-off, a sniff, a drink) · both dogs choosing to come back for more.

Not sure? Do a consent test.

It takes five seconds and lets the dogs tell you what they want. Use it as often as you like.

1. **Hold.** Gently hold back the dog who seems over the top. Use the harness or a leash, not the collar.
2. **Count.** Count to three slowly and watch the other dog.
3. **Walks away?** They're done for now. Give them a break, and play one-on-one with the dog you're holding.
4. **Comes right back?** They want more. Let go and keep watching.

CLIENT HANDOUT · DOG PLAY

Wiggle Butt Academy

When to step in

Play growls are normal. What matters is the body language around them. When in doubt, consent test.

● KEEP WATCHING

- Loose, bouncy bodies
- Dogs taking turns
- Quick pauses, then back to it
- Both dogs keep coming back

▲ CHECK IN

- One dog is almost always the one being chased
- A pin that lasts more than a moment
- Play keeps getting faster and louder
- Big dog with a small one (skip chase games)

■ TAKE A BREAK

- One dog keeps leaving, hiding or tucking its tail
- Stiff bodies or a lower, harder growl
- Snaps or hard bites with no pauses
- A flat-backed, locked-on chase, or several dogs chasing one

Interrupt play kindly

- **Call your dog away** in a happy voice, reward, then send them back to play.
- **Scatter treats** away from the other dog. Sniffing slows everyone down.
- **Hard players?** Build in a break every 30 to 60 seconds.
- **Skip yelling and collar grabs.** They can make things worse.

If play turns into a fight

- **Keep your hands out.** That's how people get bitten.
- **Make a sudden loud noise** (clap, bang a pan).
- **Slide something between them,** like a gate, cushion or board.
- **Separate and check** both dogs. Punctures hide under fur.
- **Call us.** Repeat scuffles need a plan.

Set play up for success with MEET

Management
Short, supervised sessions with well-matched playmates

Environment
Pick up toys, chews and bowls; leave room to take a break

Education
Practice MARS and consent tests until they feel easy

Teaching
A recall that works around dogs, with "go play" as the reward

Puppies: best playmates are puppies their size and patient, gentle adults. Always overwhelmed, or steamrolling everyone? Both need help.

Seniors: shorter sessions and pickier taste in friends are normal. Sudden changes, stiffness or limping? Call your vet.

Not sure if it's play? Send us a video.

Record a minute or two on your phone and email info@wigglebuttacademy.com or text 469-444-1474.

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