

Dog Games

In the world of positive, relationship-based dog training, both Leslie McDevitt and Susan Garrett have introduced powerful tools that help dogs feel more confident, focused, and engaged.

Two standout concepts are Pattern Games and Vito's Thinking Game—simple yet highly effective strategies that meet dogs right where they are.

Dogs benefit greatly from predictability and patterns. They find comfort in knowing what comes next, and this sense of structure helps them feel safe.

Pattern games were developed by Leslie McDevitt in 2007, and since then, thousands of dogs have been helped by their calming and confidence-building effects. These games work because they provide consistency. Once a dog learns a pattern game, it stays the same no matter where it is practiced. Whether at home, in a busy park, or in a new training environment, the familiar pattern creates a sense of order. This predictability often leads to a noticeable reduction in anxiety, especially for dogs who may feel overwhelmed in new or stimulating situations.

Complementing this structured approach is Vito's Thinking Game, popularized by Susan Garrett. This silent, interactive game encourages dogs to become active problem-solvers. Using two treat-filled bowls and a simple obstacle, the dog learns to independently figure out how to navigate the space to access rewards. Rather than being directed every step of the way, the dog uses its own initiative and thinking skills. This builds focus, confidence, and a strong sense of agency. At the same time, it strengthens the bond between dog and handler, as the dog learns that engagement and persistence lead to success.

Together, Pattern Games and Vito's Thinking Game highlight an important truth in dog training: when dogs feel safe, understood, and empowered, they are far more capable of learning and thriving. These methods don't rely on pressure or correction—instead, they tap into a dog's natural desire for clarity, consistency, and connection.

Vito's Thinking Game: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlEhIhQOWyI>

The Ping Pong Game: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tq4e6V1h15g>