

# Enrichment for Dogs

*Studies have shown that environmental enrichment can reduce stress-related, repetitive (stereotypical) behavior in zoo and laboratory animals. It can also provide an anti-anxiety and therapeutic effect against stressors for animals. Environmental enrichment in companion animals can help prevent unwanted behaviors that can lead to relinquishment to shelters or considerations of euthanasia.*

*Environmental enrichment can help to improve your relationship with your dog, decrease stress for both you and your pet, and provide mental and physical stimulation to keep your dog healthy and happy.*

*This document contains some easy tips for using training, toys and activities to engage and stimulate your canine companion.*

## Training

Training can be a wonderful means of canine-human interaction for dogs of any age. Five minutes of training three times a day provides a structured interaction between you and your dog and helps reinforce the basic commands you use in everyday life: sit, down, come, stay, leave it, off, etc. You can also use this time to teach your dog fun tricks.

Training your dog helps improve your bond and provides a way for you to communicate in a language your dog understands.



Enrichment for Dogs - continued

# Puzzle Toys

Puzzle toys are used as a means of combining the natural reward of feeding with physical and mental stimulation for your dog. Studies have shown that puzzle toys increase exercise and reduce barking. Additional studies in working dogs have shown that using puzzle toys does not reduce dogs' drive to work and increases their ability to learn through praise.

One of the best uses of puzzle toys is to feed your dog, rather than simply placing their food in a dish. Some of the toys can also be filled with very tasty things (peanut butter, canned dog food, cream cheese, etc.) that your dog might find very exciting, and which have higher "reward" value than dry dog food (unless weight control is an objective). Any of the red, blue or black rubber puzzle toys made by Kong, and the Football and Twist and Treat made by Premier, can have snacks frozen in them, which provides longer-lasting distraction and entertainment for your dog.

Puzzle toys can also be used as a means of distraction when you leave the house, entertaining your dog when human interactions are not available. You can also teach your dog a 'safe spot' to use if they get overwhelmed or need a break. Place the puzzle toy in that spot and have the dog stay in that spot to consume the treats or food in the toy.

Using a puzzle toy to feed pets that are confined for prolonged periods while owners are away from home can have additional benefits. They may reduce the anxiety of dogs by ensuring that they perceive the presence of food even in the absence of the owner.

The use of puzzle toys should be monitored the first time a new toy is introduced to ensure that the toy is not being destroyed and consumed. The use of puzzle toys in a household with multiple dogs should also be closely monitored to ensure the dogs do not guard these toys from one another.

## Some of the many puzzle toys available

### Kong Toys



Biscuit Ball



Classic



Stuff-A-Ball



Wobbler

### PetSafe Busy Buddy Toys



Bouncy Bone



Kibble Nibble



Twist 'n Treat



Tug-a-Jug

### Planet Dog



Mazee



Snoop



Everlasting Fun Ball

### Other



Dog Pyramid



Buster Cube



**Enrichment for Dogs - continued****Puzzle Toys****How to use Puzzle Toys**

Toys you fill with dry dog food: Buster Cube, Dog Pyramid, Everlasting Fun Ball, Kibble Nibble\*, Kong Wobbler\*, Mazee, Snoop, and Tug-a-Jug

1. Fill these toys with the appropriate amount of your dog's dry dog food to keep it in a healthy body condition.
2. Place a small amount of something very tasty at the opening in the toy where the dry dog food comes out (peanut butter, cream cheese, canned dog food, etc.) and offer the toy to your dog.
3. As long as your dog shows interest in the puzzle toy, place the toy on the ground and let your dog start to lick it and move it around with his nose. If your dog does not show interest in the puzzle toy, you may need to try something else that is tasty at the opening where the dry dog food comes out.
4. If your dog loses interest in the puzzle toy before emptying all of the dry dog food from it, try dumping some of the dry food out of the toy in front of your dog. See if you can get him to resume interest in getting the dry dog food out of the toy.

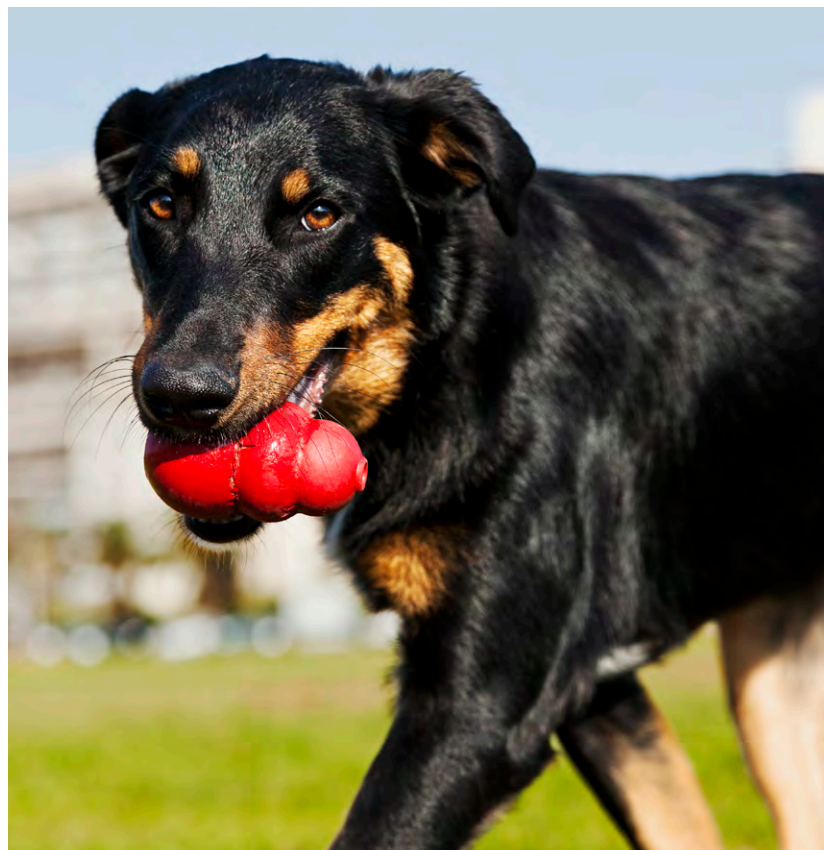
If this does not work, you may need to place something very tasty at the opening of the toy again, to remind your dog that the puzzle toy is very interesting and that tasty things come from the toy.

5. If your dog still does not show interest in the puzzle toy, you can try loading it with high-value foods instead of dry dog food. Transition to dog food once your dog understands how the toy works.

\*The Kibble Nibble and Kong Wobbler can be opened up for you to feed your dog directly from the open toys rather than a food bowl. You can do this for several meals to teach your dog that playing with puzzle toys will reward them with their food.

Toys you fill with things other than dry dog food: All Kong toys (except the Wobbler), Twist and Treat, Bouncy Bone (comes with its own treats)

1. Fill the puzzle toy with something tasty. Many people use dry dog food or hard treats mixed with canned dog food, cream cheese, peanut butter, gravy or chicken broth, depending on the toy and the dog's preferences.
2. Offer the puzzle toy to your dog. As long as your dog shows interest in licking the tasty treat out of the toy, place it on the ground and let your dog move it around to attempt to get the treat out.
3. If your dog loses interest in the puzzle toy before finishing the treats inside, pick the toy up and offer it again a few minutes later. See if your dog shows renewed interest in eating the treats from the toy. You may find that you need to use a different tasty treat if your dog is not excited about the treat you have chosen.



## Enrichment for Dogs - continued

# Activity

Activity had been shown to increase the ability of an animal's brain to function, decrease mental decline associated with aging and increase learning in dogs. Increasing the activity level of laboratory animals has been shown to decrease unwanted behaviors.

Activity provides a structured outlet for energy and mental stimulation for your dog. There are many forms of activity you can share with your dog that do wonders for your dog's physical and mental health, including:

- Structured classes
- Off-leash time in a safe, green space so your dog can play at "dog speed" with other dogs
- Play in your own backyard or a dog park
- Leashed walks.

Simply letting your dog out into your yard does not ensure that activity will happen; many dogs will just stand in the yard and wait to be let back into the house. Try to ensure that your dog is actually running around and that you provide some means of mental stimulation in addition to the physical stimulation of movement.

Examples of this include:

- Hang a rope or inner-tube from a branch or other item in the yard for the dog to play tug
- Make a sand box by sectioning off a four to five foot square area in your yard
- Buy a child's wading pool and fill it with sand or dirt. If the dog enjoys both water and digging, you can alternate the substrate in the pool each week.

Consider the following activities to enjoy with your dog.

### **Walking/Running**

Taking your dog for a walk or a run provides both physical exercise and mental stimulation. It can also be a bonding experience for you and your dog. It provides direct interactions and a forum to practice basic obedience and communication skills. Remember that jogging or running with your dog doesn't replace allowing your dog time to follow its nose, to explore paths that aren't on your route, or to interact with other dogs, if your dog is appropriate in such interactions.

### **Obedience**

Basic and advanced obedience training classes are available at most training centers. There are also trainers that will do in-home training if your dog is not a good candidate for group classes. Obedience training is a wonderful, interactive experience for you and your dog and can be done with dogs of any age. Obedience classes should be completely positive-reinforcement based, ensuring that the interactions you have with your dog while training are fun for both of you.

### **Agility**

Agility is a great form of exercise for dogs that have the inclination to jump, get on and off surfaces, crawl under things or that have a high working drive. It is highly structured and very physical. It is a great form of exercise for anxious or high energy dogs and is a physical activity that can be fun for you as well. You can acquire agility equipment to use at home if your dog is not a good candidate for a group learning environment.

### **Flyball**

Flyball is a great form of exercise for dogs that really like to carry a toy in their mouth. It is highly structured and very physical. It can be a great form of exercise for anxious or high energy dogs. This activity is great if you like the idea of a competition sport but you or your dog do not have interest in agility.

### **Sheep Herding**

Herding is a great form of exercise for dogs that like to keep everyone and everything together in one space. It is another great form of exercise for anxious or high energy dogs, as long as they interact well with the animals they are herding. It is also a great way to spend structured time with your dog outside that provides physical and mental stimulation for both of you.

### **Frisbee**

Frisbee is a great form of exercise for dogs that like to jump and who can grab toys while they are in the air. It is another great form of exercise for anxious or high energy dogs. Try Frisbee if you want to be actively involved in the activity with your dog – you can learn to throw a Frisbee while you teach your dog to catch!



## Enrichment for Dogs - continued

### References

[kongcompany.com](http://kongcompany.com)

[store.petsafe.net/toys](http://store.petsafe.net/toys) (Busy Buddy)

Claxton AM. The potential of the human–animal relationship as an environmental enrichment for the welfare of zoo-housed animals. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 133 (2011) 1–10.

Gaines SA, Rooney NJ, Bradshaw JW. The effect of feeding enrichment upon reported working ability and behavior of kenneled working dogs. *J Forensic Sci.* 2008 Nov;53(6):1400-4. Epub 2008 Sep 18.

Gottlieb DH, Ghirardo S, Minier DE, Sharpe N, Tatum L, McCowan B. Efficacy of 3 types of foraging enrichment for rhesus macaques (*Macaca mulatta*). *J Am Assoc Lab Anim Sci.* 2011 Nov;50(6):888-94.

Hendriksen H, Prins J, Olivier B, Oosting RS. Environmental enrichment induces behavioral recovery and enhanced hippocampal cell proliferation in an antidepressant-resistant animal model for PTSD. *PLoS One.* 2010 Aug 5;5(8):e11943.

Loveridge GG. Environmentally enriched dog housing. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 59 (1998). 101–113.

Macgillivray L, Reynolds KB, Rosebush PI, Mazurek MF. The comparative effects of environmental enrichment with exercise and serotonin transporter blockade on serotonergic neurons in the dorsal raphe nucleus. *Synapse.* 2012 May;66(5):465-70. doi: 10.1002/syn.21511. Epub 2012 Jan 4.

Marston LC, Bennett PC. Reforging the bond—towards successful canine adoption. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 83 (2003) 227–245.

Morris CL, Grandin T, Irlbeck NA. Companion Animals Symposium: Environmental enrichment for companion, exotic, and laboratory animals. *J Anim Sci.* 2011 Dec;89(12):4227-38.

Varman DR, Marimuthu G, Rajan KE. Environmental enrichment exerts anxiolytic effects in the Indian field mouse (*Mus booduga*). *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 136 (2012) 166–173.

Wells DL. A review of environmental enrichment for kennelled dogs, *Canis familiaris*. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, Volume 85, Issues 3–4, 25 March 2004, Pages 307-317.

