



Enrichment

We all love spending time with our dogs, but how can we make sure it is time well spent that enhances their quality of life and encourages them to reach their full potential?

Dogs are social, intelligent and active animals so it is important to provide them with safe and suitable opportunities to exercise their bodies and minds, during every stage of life! Mental and physical activity can also prevent boredom, while teaching a variety of skills such as problem-solving, confidence, agility and searching! Sounds like fun!

Making the most of walkies!

Have a chat with your vet about your dog's exercise requirements, because these may change during parts of their life, and in times of illness or injury. Don't worry if they can't have long walks, there are lots of fun things you can do to make the most of even a short walk! Make sure your dog is up to date with flea, worm and lungworm prevention!

Taking a different route – even if you're just going out for a short time – will give your dog new experiences and in particular, smells! It's easy for us humans to forget how important this is for our dogs so liven up your neighbourhood for them by going to different places!

Plan interactive walks! As well as allowing your dog ample opportunity to stretch their legs and to sniff, include activities like playing with toys, searching for food you've scattered or thrown for them, practising tricks in the park, laying treat-trails for them to follow – you'll both be happily exhausted!

If it's safe to do so and you've checked they're not likely to fall or lose balance, encouraging your dog to place their paws on objects or to balance on or walk along fallen trees for example can be an exciting way to liven up a walk! You can also teach them to run around lampposts, post boxes or bins, or crawl beneath objects such as park benches – the possibilities are endless if you get creative!

Bowls are boring, play Food Games instead!

Dogs love eating, so they really enjoy food games! You don't need to worry about your dog gaining weight as you can split their daily food allowance into portions to use in different ways throughout each day.

There are lots of great puzzle-feeders available to buy, including rubber ones that can be pre-filled and chilled to make them last longer – and that you can have ready-prepared.

Why not get creative and make your own! When you're recycling keep anything that is safe for your dog to use – think kibble hidden within scrunched up newspaper inside cardboard boxes, or empty plastic bottles (lids removed!) with kibble inside. Remember to supervise in case your dog needs help!

Scatter food inside or in the garden so that your dog can hunt for it! Or lay treat-trails for your dog to follow and watch them sniff along – be creative, draw shapes or spell out their name!

Trick Training

Teach your dog new tricks using reward-based training. This type of mental exercise is as tiring as physical exercise! This is also a great way of improving the dog-owner relationship and giving nervous dogs more confidence. You could teach them to walk through your legs, run all the way around you, turn around on the spot in both directions, give a paw one at a time, pick things up and give them to you... the possibilities are endless!

Games with Toys

Play uses physical energy, channels mental energy and builds confidence and relationships like nothing else!

Rotating toys is a good idea, so they don't become boring, as dogs often enjoy novelty. Swapping toys weekly means your dog is likely to stay excited and interested in them!

Dogs naturally want to use their mouths for holding, tugging and shaking toys – this is completely normal behaviour! But if you feel teeth on your skin/clothes at any point during the game then end the game right away by staying calm, quiet and moving away. Telling your dog off will only confuse them, as they might think they're being told off for playing and not want to join in again. They need to know they can only put their teeth onto the toy, so simply end the game if at any time their teeth make contact with you. After a short break come back and play again – they'll soon learn that the fun can continue as long as they keep their mouth on the toy!

It's perfectly okay to let your dog win the game! Dogs can enjoy taking turns so making sure you both win will create a balanced play session!

It's also okay for dogs to rip soft toys up – this is natural behaviour – just make sure you're supervising so they don't swallow any small bits and always give them a tasty treat or two when you're taking away bits of their toys, so they don't worry about this!

Environmental enrichment

Dogs can benefit from having the opportunity to experience different environments as these have different sights, sounds and smells to stimulate their senses. Visiting and exploring brand new places can be thoroughly enjoyable for them. Just make sure they're always enjoying themselves and if they ever show any sign of becoming worried by something they see, hear or smell calmly lead them away.

Think about giving your dog the opportunity to walk on different surfaces, smell and even taste (make sure whatever you're giving your dog is safe for them!) new things and see which kinds of places they seem to enjoy most – is it the woods or the beach for example? Just make sure they're comfortable travelling if you're heading off on a long investigative adventure!

Water can be great fun, as long as your dog is comfortable and feels safe – so take it gently to begin with. You can use things like shallow paddling pools in the garden to give your dog different experiences and playtimes!

Enrichment through choice within the home!

We can also enrich our dogs' lives by giving them choices, where safe and appropriate, within their personal surroundings. For example, you might have bought them a lovely dog-bed, yet they still choose to sleep on the rug... as long as they're safe, letting them make these kinds of choices will give them confidence and add to their quality of life!

Providing suitable outlets for your dog's energy will help keep them from getting into mischief at home!

Doing lots of activities that you can both enjoy together will enhance your bond and build your dog's confidence, helping to prevent unwanted behaviours!

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