



# Enrichment

Dogs are social, intelligent and active animals, so it's 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 prevent boredom, build confidence, and teach a variety of skills such as problem solving, searching and agility.

## Making the most of walks

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

Taking a different route will give your dog new experiences and, in particular, smells! It's easy for us to forget how important this is for our dogs, so liven up walks for them by going to different places.

Plan interactive walks. As well as allowing your dog ample opportunity to stretch their legs and sniff, include activities such as playing with toys, searching for food you've scattered or thrown for them, practising tricks in the park and 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 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.



## Food games

Dogs love eating, so they usually really enjoy food games! If you're worried about your dog gaining weight, 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.

Why not get creative and make your own! When you're recycling, keep anything that is safe for your dog to use, such as kibble hidden within scrunched up newspaper inside cardboard boxes, or empty plastic bottles (with 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!



## Environmental enrichment

Dogs can benefit from having the opportunity to experience a range of environments, as these have different sights, sounds and smells to stimulate their senses. Visiting and exploring brand new places can be thoroughly enjoyable for your dog. 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, or smell and even taste new things - as long as it's safe to do so! See what kinds of places your dog seems to enjoy most, for example is it the woods or the beach?

Make sure your dog is comfortable travelling if you're heading off on a long investigative adventure - our **Car Travel** handout provides some top tips.

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.



## Games with toys

Play uses physical energy and focusses mental energy, as well as building confidence and relationships!

Rotating toys is a good idea as dogs often enjoy novelty. Swapping toys weekly means your dog is likely to stay excited and interested in them.

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 are supervising so they don't swallow any small parts. Always give your dog a tasty treat or two when you're taking away bits of their toys, so they don't worry about this.



Dogs naturally want to use their mouths for holding, tugging and shaking toys! However, if you feel teeth on your skin or clothes at any point during the game, then end the game by staying calm, quiet and still.

If necessary, calmly move away. After a short break come back and play again – your dog will soon learn that the fun can continue as long as they keep their mouth on the toy!

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. Our handout on **Chewing and Mouthing** provides lots of other useful tips.

## Trick training

Try teaching your dog new tricks using reward-based training. This type of mental exercise can be just as tiring as physical exercise! Training with rewards is also a great way of improving the dog-owner relationship and giving dogs more confidence.

You could teach your dog to walk through your legs, 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!

Our handout on **Training with Rewards** provides lots of useful tips and explains why reward-based training is the best way for dogs to learn.

## Enrichment through choice

We can also enrich our dogs' lives by giving them choices within their personal surroundings, where safe and appropriate to do so. For example, you might have bought your dog a lovely new dog bed, yet they still choose to sleep on the rug! As long as your dog is 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.



## Contacts for further support

We provide lifelong telephone-based behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your **Dogs Trust dog** please email:

**[postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk](mailto:postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk)**

Everyone else can access support by emailing our training and behaviour helpline:

**[behavioursupportline@dogstrust.org.uk](mailto:behavioursupportline@dogstrust.org.uk)**

Your nearest Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via:

**[dogstrustdogschoo.org.uk](http://dogstrustdogschoo.org.uk)**

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.

### A dog is for life ®

Dogs Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales (1167663), and in Scotland (SC053144), and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (09365971).

© Dogstrust 2024  
**[dogstrust.org.uk](http://dogstrust.org.uk)**