



Enrichment Activities for Your Dog

Humans actively seek out enrichment in their own lives. We read books, play video games, watch movies and exercise. Enrichment is anything mentally or physically challenging that is rewarding. Our dog's lives are not nearly as exciting as ours are. We get up every morning, drive to work, talk to people, eat different foods and are generally satisfied. Modern dogs really don't have much to do in comparison to their capabilities. Wild dogs must hunt for food, seek shelter, fight for mates and travel constantly. Our domestic dogs no longer have the need to perform such tasks so we need to find constructive ways to enrich their lives.

Walks The best enrichment activity for any dog is walking. Walking is beneficial for many reasons. Walking allows dogs to explore the outside world, be healthier, release excess energy, spend time with you and even prevent some behavioral problems. Dogs lacking in exercise must find other ways to release pent up energy. Without an appropriate outlet, most dogs will resort to digging, destructive behaviors and barking out of boredom.

Remember a tired dog is a good dog. To start a walking program:

- Always check with your doctor and vet before starting a walking program. Your vet should be able to give you a good idea of how long your dog can walk. Puppies and even large breed adolescent dogs can do irreversible damage to their growing bodies. Start with short walks only.
- Get the right equipment. Find comfy shoes and proper tools for your dog. Make sure you have a good quality collar and leash. A head halter may make the walk more comfortable with you and your dog. Some dogs that are awful on a leash are perfect on a Gentle Leader. If you and your dog are comfortable you are more likely to walk.
- Keep a journal of your progress. Write down how far or how long you are walking each day. Set small goals for you and your dog.

Interactive Toys In the past few years there has been an onslaught of dog toys to hit the market. Many of the toys are interactive and incredibly mentally enriching. Toys don't have to be expensive to be good. Obviously, keep an eye on the condition of the toys to prevent choking. See handout "Interactive Dog Toys."

- Kongs, Squirrel Dudes and Sterilized Bones: These toys are great because they can be stuffed with different types of foods the dog has to work to get out. These are mentally enriching.
- Treat Ball, Buster Cube and Twist n' Treat: Dogs will knock these toys around to get food out which is physically and mentally stimulating. You can even use regular dry dog food.
- Puzzle Toys: The I Qube, Hide-a-Squirrel and Intellibone are excellent toys for teaching the dog problem solving. These toys are plush so please monitor chewing.

Games Some dogs are natural athletes. Give them something fun to do with that energy. See handout "Games, Games, Games!"

- Fetch: Retrievers, herding breeds and many mixed breeds love chasing after a ball. Incorporate some obedience commands to make the game mentally and physically demanding.
- Almost any childhood game such as tag, hide-and-seek and tug of war can be modified to include dogs. These games will bring out the kid in you.
- Organized Dog Sports: There are dog sports for almost any breed of dog. Try out several activities to see which your dog likes best. Agility, Flyball, drafting and tracking are terrific activities for owner and dog.

Obedience Training Group obedience classes are a great way to give your dog mental stimulation. Just as we take classes to better ourselves, dogs benefit from an education as well. Learning a new skill-set is challenging and exciting for dogs. Find a class using positive reinforcement at the Humane Society of Southern Arizona and see the genius in your dog.

For more information on dog behavior, visit hssaz.org and click on Pet Training.