



## RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

# Entertaining Your Dog

Most people are aware of how to care for their canine companion's physical health needs; however their mental well being is often not given quite the same amount of attention.

Good psychological health will enable your dog to be calm, able to cope more readily with stressful events and generally have a more enjoyable life. Additionally keeping your dog entertained will reduce the opportunity that your dog has to practice problem behaviours such as nuisance barking, digging, chewing and escaping.

### **Provide regular exercise outside the yard.**

Dogs need to burn off all of their energy otherwise it can be channelled into nuisance behaviours. For many confident dogs, time outside the yard provides much needed mental stimulation (a variety of sights, smells and sounds); even dogs in the biggest yards can become bored if not taken out regularly.

Opportunities to play outside the yard either at the beach, park or at another house are also great options for the active dog. For older dogs or for those that experience joint problems swimming is a fantastic non-weight bearing exercise.

It is important to provide physical exercise in balance with calm time. Rest days, 'couch days' or 'chill out' days where no training or strenuous exercise takes place and the dog is left to rest and relax is a good thing! Just like our need to chill and watch a DVD or read a good book, our dogs also need time to unwind and recuperate.

### **Toys**

Toys can be very useful in keeping dogs amused for hours. There are a large variety of toys available (rope / tugs, squeaky, balls etc.) and it is worth experimenting to find toys your dog really enjoys. Importantly, remember to consider the size and material of the toys appropriate for your dog to avoid choking hazards and accidents. Kong's are enjoyed by most dogs and provide a challenge and good chewing experience. It is important to rotate the toys on a regular basis so that your dog does not become bored. Why not try a toy box, and each day change the toys your dog has access to.



But.... No matter how many toys a dog has, a ball still won't throw itself!

### **Use Food to Entertain**

Ditch the food bowl! Dogs are naturally scavengers so give them a job to do and teach them to work for their food.

- Food can be hand fed, with food used as rewards throughout the day when your dog behaves appropriately.



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- Food can be hidden in different locations and your dog must go on a search to find the hidden morsels. You can vary the spots where you put the food and make the search progressively more challenging.
- Provide raw bones or raw hides, this can provide your dog with hours of valuable appropriate chewing activity.
- Food can also be used in food/puzzle toys, such as treat balls, buster cubes or Kong's. See 'Treat dispensing toys' info sheet for more ideas.
- Take some old rags or towels (that you don't mind being ripped or dirtied), tie together into large knots and place dry treats inside the knots. For an added challenge, hide the rags inside a 'hol-ee roller' dog toy.
- Use cardboard tubes (toilet paper rolls, empty glad wrap rolls) containing treats, rolled up in paper.
- Place a hole in the bottom of a milk bottle big enough for the treats to fall out. Tie the bottle to hang from a tree branch. For inexperienced dogs hang it just above nose height. You may need to show that dog that by knocking the milk bottle around the treats will fall out.
- Doggy bag - place dog biscuits in brown paper bag or newspaper and scrunch up
- Make a doggy popsicle by freezing some of your dog's food in a container filled with water or weak stock solution.

If you have more than 1 dog, care will need to be taken to ensure fights don't start. You may need to separate dogs, or please ask us for advice.

### To make a treat bottle:

1. Simply take the lid, plastic ring and labels off a clean, empty 2lt plastic milk bottle.
2. Cut a few holes in the sides just big enough for the treats to fall out.
3. Place treats or dog biscuits inside.
4. To make the bottle extra enticing smear a small amount of peanut butter or vegemite on the outside.

### To make an ice treat:

1. Place various dog treats in an ice-cream container.
  2. Fill with water. You may even like to add a little stock powder for additional flavour.
  3. Freeze overnight
  4. Once frozen tip the ice treat out of the container for your dog to enjoy.
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### Kongs

Whatever food you feed your dogs, it can be stuffed into a Kong toy. This makes the food last so much longer, which slows down fast eaters and keeps your dog amused for ages.

Make it easy to start with and just stuff your dog's dry food into a Kong. Once they have mastered this, try soaking dry food in water, and then freezing.

Then try stuffing a Kong with some mince or raw chicken wings or chicken necks. (For more information and recipe ideas see our 'Kongs' information sheet).



### Chewing problems?

Remember that dogs are opportunists so remove or prevent access to that new pair of shoes or the white sheets hanging on the line.

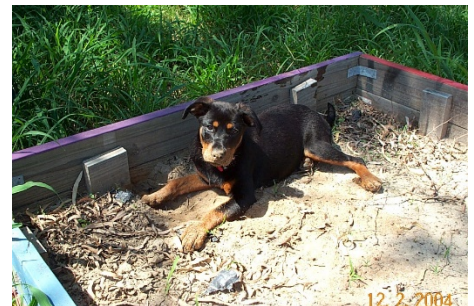
Once you do that, it is important to teach your dog what they can chew on.

Try dipping a rope toy in a bucket with chicken or beef stock. Hang out to dry before offering it to the dog. Once the dog takes the rope toy in his/her mouth the saliva will release the full flavour encouraging your dog to chew continuously.

Dog chews such as deer antlers, pigs ears, beef ears/tendons, jerky chews and bully sticks can work well. Why not stock up and experiment and see what lasts longer for your dog. Remember to supervise your dog with any new chew or toy first before leaving them alone with it.

### Digging

Many dogs like to dig and it is important to provide an area where they can do this without destroying the rest of the yard. Digging pits such as a children's clam shell pool filled with sand are great. Bury bones or toys so that your dog can have fun digging them up. Refer to 'Digging' info sheet for more info.



### Water

You can also fill up a clam shell with a little water and toss treats in to encourage your dog to cool down in summer. For more summer ideas, refer to our 'Tips for Summer' info sheet.

### Different surfaces and resting spots

Some dogs enjoy sitting on different surfaces and heights. A sand mound can be warm in winter and create height and dirt/sand to bury in can be cool in summer.

### Sound

Try leaving a radio or TV on when you are not at home. You may consider using a timer, so that it will turn on at different times of the day.

Specially created CD's such as "Through a Dogs Ear" can help to relax some dogs



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### Attend Training Classes

In addition to teaching your dog manners, training also provides your dog with the opportunity to interact with other people and dogs and to obtain some much needed mental stimulation. Consider fun activities such as Trick Training, Agility, Flyball and other doggie sports

### Resources:

Facebook groups focused on enrichment:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/canineenrichment/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1747279312231501/>

Youtube clips:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAQ47cPeVcY&t=100s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtgROnCtRTo>

Mornement. Dr Kate, Pets Behaving Badly, Wild at Heart: Why Enrichment is Essential for Your Pet's Well-Being: <http://katemornementanimalbehaviourist.blogspot.com/2017/09/wild-at-heart-why-enrichment-is.html?spref=fb&m=1>

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