

## Enrichment for Dogs

### What is enrichment?

**Enrichment** is anything that improves the quality of your dog's life. It may involve an increase or a decrease in stimulation. Enrichment activities encourage your dog to participate in behaviors that are natural to them. In other words, they allow your dog to be a dog!



### Engage All Five Senses

By focusing on engaging all of your dog's senses, you can be sure to offer them with a healthy variety of enriching experiences. Variety ensures that your dog's mental and physical needs are being met. Keep in mind that daily mental stimulation is just as important as physical exercise.

**Scents:** Your dog sees the world through scents. Their ability to detect and analyze scents is staggering. Use your dog's sense of smell to engage their brain in solving problems.

1. [Take a Sniffy Walk!](#) Allow your dog to smell what they want, for as long as they want.
2. Treat treasure hunt! Hide treats around your home or yard for your dog to find.
3. Introduce new scents to your dog. This could include dog-safe essential oil on a cloth, blankets that came from another animal, or store-bought animal urine.

**Sounds:** Dogs also have very sensitive hearing. Keep this in mind as you introduce new sounds, because playing sounds that are too loud or jarring may cause distress.

1. Play soothing classical music, or dog-specific calming soundtracks to help your dog relax. Studies have shown that calming sounds positively affect dog behavior.
2. Play books on tape. This may be something you and your dog can enjoy together, or something to leave playing for your dog when they are alone.
3. Play animal sounds to engage your dog's ears. This is only recommended as a supervised activity. Search online or find a sound-specific app to play with.

**Sights:** Dogs don't see nearly as well as we do, but that doesn't mean they aren't interested in beautiful or interesting sights. They see best in tones of yellow and blue.

1. [Subscribe to DogTV](#), which is specifically designed to engage your dog's senses.
2. Place a bird feeder outside a window where your dog can watch the activity.
3. Vary your walking route to keep sights, smells, and sounds varied on each outing.

**Taste:** Variety is the spice of life! Incorporate special treats every now and then to engage their taste buds in new and exciting ways.

1. Does your dog have a favorite treat? Rotate treat types and flavors to keep their taste buds guessing. This prevents a high-value treat from becoming boring over time.
2. Some dogs love vegetables (raw or frozen). Be sure to stick to dog-safe options.
3. Stuffed Kongs are a great way to occupy our dogs for long periods of time. Fill them with many different tasty snacks - from peanut butter to bananas to baby food!

**Touch:** There are two types of touch - touch your dog initiates and touch that happens to them. Both types of touch can be enriching so long as it is enjoyable to your dog.

1. Try a doggy massage! Use gentle pressure in circular motions on your dog's neck, shoulders and back. Avoid using too much pressure or causing discomfort.
2. Walking on and rolling or digging in different substrates can be an exciting way to pass the time. Take a walk on sand, dirt, gravel, concrete, or grass. If your dog wants to roll around or start digging, you know they're having fun!
3. Water and ice can provide fun and interesting tactile experiences for your dog. Offer a baby pool with some water in it, or a frozen treat to your dog in the summer.

## Play!

**Social Play:** This includes play with any other animal or human. Remember that dogs are social creatures!

1. Playtime with age-appropriate social dogs is a great way to burn off mental/emotional energy, and to learn necessary social skills. Keep play frequent, but short and sweet.
2. Parallel walks or group walks can also provide protected social contact between dogs, so long as all dogs are given freedom of movement and enjoy being around each other.

**Play with Toys:** Dogs benefit from play with a variety of toys that they can chase, chew or dissect. These are natural behaviors for dogs, which help them burn excess energy.

1. Playing fetch allows your dog to run, chase, and grab toys. The added benefit is that it encourages coming back to you and dropping objects on cue.
2. Tug with Rules is a safe game to play between adults and dogs. When played with rules, your dog learns to collaborate with you, practice dropping on cue and to wait patiently for the game to resume. For more information, check out our handout "Tug with Rules".
3. A flirt pole is a great alternative for the dog who loves to chase and tug. It is also a safe option for play between children and dogs. Flirt poles can be purchased online, or made at home using PVC pipe, a bungee cord, and a toy.

**Solving Problems for Fun:** Believe it or not, problem-solving can be fun for your dog! The goal of using problem-solving tasks for enrichment is to challenge our dogs without frustrating them.

1. Foraging games involve encouraging your dog to scavenge for food. Store-bought and DIY food puzzles can be a great way to serve meals. For DIY options, use cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, or simply scatter food around the house or yard.
2. Clicker training and other learning games mentally tire out your dog in a healthy way. Teach your dog a new trick, or take up a dog sport such as agility, treibball, or canine freestyle.

For more resources, check out <https://sfhumanesociety.org/behavior-library/>