



ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT AS WE KNOW IT TODAY

1. Environmental enrichment is not about giving your dog a bone and hoping it will be content. It is about providing your dog with stimulation that allows it carry out natural behaviour as well as prevent boredom. Active play should be for outside only and this is where the dog is allowed to get really excited. Passive play is for inside where it has something to do but is kept calm and quiet. An example of active play is a ball and an example of passive play is a stuffed Kong.

2. Environmental enrichment needs to stimulate the entire dog's senses - sight, hearing, taste, feel. It needs to be visually interesting, it needs to make some noise, it needs to be tasty and appealing to either chew on or eat and it needs to be textured so it feels nice to chew on and play with.



3. Toys need to also stimulate the brain and allow for problem solving. Treat balls can really encourage the dog to use its brain as the dog needs to move the ball around to get the food to fall out. This is especially entertaining for dogs who are at home a lot on their own.

4. Stuffed Kong toys hidden around the yard encourage the dog to search for its food and then gives it something to chew on for hours. Kongs can also be frozen with yummy treats. Great Kong stuffing is dried biscuits, liver treats, Chicken Chunkers, 4 Legs, Nature's Gift treats and any leftovers you might have like toast crusts or roast meats. Animal behaviourists suggest giving 70% of your dog's daily food ration through food dispensing toys to prevent boredom and separation issues. Some great products are Bob A Lot, Tug-a Jug and Busy Buddies. These can all be found online or in good pet stores.



5. Ban the food bowl and start scattering the food in the yard or apartment. Dried biscuits, treats even soft food can all be tossed out to the yard and left for the dog to find. This encourages natural behaviour of hunting and foraging and can give the dog hours of entertainment. Don't worry about birds, ants or dirt; it provides it with even more fun.

6. Look for toys made of good quality, durable materials like rubber, resin plastic, thick rope. Avoid cheap plastic toys, toys with stuffing and toys with removable parts, toys that break down easily or toys that can cause choking.



7. Toys that should be in your dog's toy box are: Kongs, rubber balls (ensure it is not small enough to swallow), rope tugs, squeaky toy, Frisbee, plastic water bottle, cardboard rolls, ice cream containers, plant pots, treat



ball (made by Aussie Dogs), good quality rubber chew toys and floating toys for swimming dogs.

8. More environmental enrichment designed to allow your dog to mimic natural behaviour is a paddle pool and a digging pit. For paddle pools and digging pits, simply purchase a clam shell from outlets like Kmart or Big W. One half can be filled with water and the other half with sand. For smaller breeds, you can use a cat litter tray or shallow storage container. Bungee bottles are another inexpensive entertainer for dogs and can also stop birds coming down to steal their food. If you want to see how one is made and how it is used, go to my Face Book site at Point Cook Dog Training and got to the albums. Look for dogs having fun and you will see my dog playing with his bottle. He self feeds every day and when he needs it topped up, he lets me know. The idea behind the bungee bottle is to tap it until the food pops out of the hole down the bottom. Simply fill the bottle with dried food or some treats and away they go.
9. Avoid toys that resemble real animals or real human objects. Toys like shoes, clothes, dolls, teddy bears, cats, birds or anything with eyes and limbs needs to be avoided, especially for breeds with strong predatory behaviour. These objects can confuse dogs and encourage bad behaviour.
10. Always rotate the toys around so the dog thinks it got something new and encourage play with your dog by using its toys. This helps create a real positive association towards the toys and to encourage using them all the time. I also recommend picking all the toys up at the end of the day and placing them back in the toy basket. This gives you a good indication after, if your dog is playing with them or not as they will either be left untouched or strewn across the yard



Please be careful of games such as tug-o-war, wrestling and chasing. These games over-stimulate your dog, can encourage out of control behaviour, can rev the dog up to the point where it lashes out, can scare the dog and can encourage predatory behaviour. Rough housing will not help your mouthing and biting situation therefore you are better off not doing it.

The advantage of not revving dogs up when they are young is that as they approach adulthood, they become really cool, calm dogs. The pups that have a lot of revving and stirring as they are growing up, tend to become quite manic and easily over stimulated adult dogs- it is not worth revving them up.

Some games like tug-o-war may be introduced when the dog is about 6 months of age as it will have learned self-control by then. If you are unable to settle your dog when playing these games though, then avoid them.

Children should not play rough, stirring and chasing games with dogs.