

LOOKING AFTER YOUR DOG'S MENTAL WELLBEING

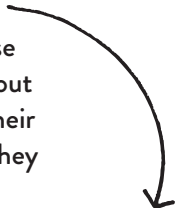
Mental stimulation is just as important as physical exercise for our dogs. You can help keep your dog's brain stimulated in many ways by taking them on new routes, different dog parks, or introducing new dog toys, games and activities to your routine.

Many common problems with dog behaviour can be managed by developing a full environmental enrichment plan to ensure your dog has everything they need to keep their bodies and brains active.



SOME SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

- 🐾 Destructive behaviour including digging and chewing
- 🐾 Barking and whining
- 🐾 Weight gain is a sign that your pet needs more exercise, but make sure you aren't overfeeding them as well
- 🐾 Your dog is hyperactive or difficult to control on walks because they've got too much pent-up energy or aren't used to being out and about. I can often tell when a dog isn't walked much by their behaviour on-lead. They can calm down pretty quickly once they start getting the appropriate exercise.
- 🐾 Repeated escapes from home
- 🐾 Pacing the room and not sitting still
- 🐾 Signs of withdrawal, anxiety or depression-like symptoms. Definitely get these checked by a vet as they might be caused by other issues including pain



**ADULT DOGS NEED TO
EXERCISE AT LEAST
30 MINUTES EVERY DAY!**

It is up to you to try to understand what your dog is trying to communicate to you through their behaviour and to see where you may be letting them down. (Sorry but in most cases it does come back to us!).


Dogs that suffer from anxiety or other Separation Related Behaviour (SRB) tend to display the behaviour immediately or not long after your departure, while a dog that starts with barking or digging later in the day generally indicates boredom.

TOP TIPS TO BEAT THE HOME-ALONE BLUES

ENSURE THEY GET THEIR DAILY WALK

A tired dog is a good dog. Ensure your dog gets a morning walk, even just that all-so-important ten-minute chance to sniff around outside before you leave them alone all day and take them out again when you get home. Hire someone to walk them during the day or share hosting of doggy dates with a friend or neighbour if your dogs get along well.

DON'T WASTE FEEDING TIME WITH A BOWL



If you feed your dog kibble, then throw or hide it around the yard or rooms of your house and encourage them to seek it out. Hunting for their food mimics how dogs in the wild foraged for their food and helps keep them mentally and physically stimulated.

If you feed your dog a wet or raw food, you obviously need to be mindful of health and hygiene issues. Probably best for those that have mastered the Treasure Hunt game (see p. 156) and are highly motivated for food, so that you don't risk it sitting out in the heat too long. Inside or out you could place wet/raw food on saucers to reduce contamination. Of course do read all of the health and safety considerations of raw feeding, especially for immune compromised animals and humans, on p. 41.

PROVIDE TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERACTIVE TOYS

Interactive toys encourage dogs to use their body and mind to work the treat, kibble or meat out of the toy and mimic how they hunt and forage for food in the wild.

Think about what type of toy would suit your dog the best. Some nervous dogs may need a quiet soft interactive toy that doesn't make loud noises when rolling around on floorboards, while other dogs may go crazy for the sound of a rattling marble or bell inside a treat dispensing toy as it rolls along.

Toys like the Kong Wobbler stuffed with their wet food or mince works well, whilst freezing it can keep them occupied for hours and is great for the warmer weather too.

Another option for the warmer months is to simply place some treats or meat in a container, fill it with water or use a bone broth instead and freeze it. Also add in a combination of a rolling or hanging treat dispensing toy if it is going to be a long day so that they have a couple of options to keep them occupied.

INSTALL A SANDPIT

Some dogs just love to dig, but if it becomes a problem there may be another underlying problem. Start by checking they have enough shade from the elements, as in the warmer weather in particular they may actually be digging a hole to lie in and cool themselves down. If it is because they are bored or anxious and/or it makes them feel good, then you can use a sandpit to divert the digging to a designated area and bury treats or toys to encourage them to dig their heart out. This is another great way to mimic how a dog might forage for its food in the wild and helps work their bodies and their brains.



**ESPECIALLY GREAT FOR
DOGS THAT LIKE TO DIG**

GIVE THEM A SAFE, CALMING SPACE TO RETIRE TO

If you have followed the tips above, then quite frankly your dog should have worn itself out and be more than happy to sleep the afternoon away until you come home. Ensure your dog has a room indoors or, if left outdoors, a sturdy kennel with bedding and plenty of protection from the elements that they can retreat to and relax. If your dog is reactive to

outside noises or has a bit of anxiety, then some studies have found that playing some soft calming music can help, whilst indoor dogs might do well with some DogTV (yes there is such a thing). Music can also help block out noises too if they have noise phobia or are a reactive barker.

HUMAN CONTACT

Dogs need human companionship. They're pack animals and are not designed to be left alone all day or out in the backyard with little interaction with their family. The company of another pet is not always enough either. Just like us humans, dogs don't necessarily like every dog they meet, or even if they do they may not play together when left alone, so getting another dog is generally not a solution to addressing your dog's boredom or anxiety. You can often also end up with two dogs on your hands who are exhibiting problem behaviour.

FAMILY TIME

Life can be lonely for dogs that are kept exclusively outdoors, away from their pack. If allowing them inside your home to join the family is not an option, at least some of the time, it is imperative that their family spends a lot of time outside playing with them. Playing games requiring exercise, such as tug-of-war, fetching balls, frisbee etc., are great. Your dog actually *needs* to be with you because, to him, you are his pack, so ideally it is important to let your dog inside with you as regularly as possible.

If you are adamant they are not allowed inside, then bring their kennel as close to the family living area as possible so that they can still see you and feel close enough to protect you (which is something else they *need* to do).