



The Animal Foundation Guide to

Your Dog's Play Time and Activities



All of us for all of them.™

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Most dogs were originally bred for a purpose and were intended to have a job. Today, for many dogs their only “job” is to eat, drink, and take naps while waiting for you to come home from work. Dogs need both physical and mental stimulation, applying their senses, brains, and muscles to explore, experience, and learn new things. Dogs that stay cooped up inside all day get bored and look for ways to entertain themselves. What humans often label “behavioral problems” or signs of separation anxiety are things dogs are naturally wired to do such as scavenge, chew, dig, bark, and get into things.



- **It is up to you to enrich your dog’s life** by providing stimulating toys, environments, events, and conditions that relieve boredom and are acceptable outlets that meet your dog’s needs for physical and mental activity. If your dog is “getting into things” an added walk or longer walks, games like fetch or tug-of-war, obedience classes, and a variety of toys can all be helpful.
- **It’s important for you to establish and reinforce good behavior with enthusiastic praise.** When your dog chooses the right thing, reinforce this good behavior with enthusiastic praise! If he picks up and plays with anything else — for example, one of your shoes or a child’s toy — tell your dog “no” and quickly retrieve the item, providing him with an appropriate dog toy and make a BIG deal about the toy you have to offer. You can make this process easier by teaching your dog the “drop” or “leave it” command. When your dog follows this command quickly, give him lots of enthusiastic praise. If your dog refuses to drop the item, do not get into a tug of war. A small spray bottle can be helpful in teaching a dog what he may or may not pick up in his mouth.
- **Varying your activities together will keep it both interesting for you and your dog.** You can both enjoy a change of scenery when walking by exploring different local walking or hiking trails. Once you get basic obedience training under your belts, consider taking a class to learn a dog sports. It’s a great way to strengthen your bond and have fun with your dog and there are so many to choose from! Offer different kinds of toys to your dog and rotate them weekly by making only four or five toys available at a time.
- **Dogs are as individual as people and will vary in the amount of exercise they need and in what kinds of activities interest them.** Exercise for your dog can be viewed as a spectrum, ranging from your dog’s most basic needs, like daily walks (a universal favorite!), to intense activities like competitive dog sports. Part of bonding with your dog is discovering what activities you enjoy doing together

Toy Safety

There are many factors that contribute to the safety or danger of a toy. Most of those factors are somewhat dependent upon your dog's size, activity level, and the environment in which your dog spends his time. Many toys state they are not intended for strong or powerful chewers, other state they are not intended for chewing at all. Make sure you are getting an appropriate toy for the activity level and chewing ability of your dog.

In terms of materials used in pet toys, be aware that there are no federal regulations in place to ensure that certain standards are met for pet toys and gear. Unlike pet food, which is regulated by the FDA, it's left up to the individual pet industry manufacturers to establish standards for their own products, test them, and issue a recall if necessary.

It would be difficult to say that any dog toy is 100% safe. Always supervise your dog's play time with toys. Dogs should not be left alone with toys that can be destroyed easily. If your dog is exercised properly before you ever leave him or her alone, chances are the dog will simply sleep most of the time you are gone. A tired dog is a content and happy dog. The best toys are toys that you can play with to interact with your dog.

Although we can't guarantee your dog's safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

Dog-proof your home. Puppies and dogs use their mouths to explore their world. It is very important to dog-proof your home by keeping anything that could be ingested out of reach such as children's toys, string, rubber bands, sewing and craft notions, socks, pantyhose, etc.



- **Avoid or alter any toys that aren't "dog-proof."** "Dog-proof" can mean different things depending upon how your dog plays with toys. At the minimum, remove ribbons, strings, eyes or other parts that could be chewed and/or ingested. Dispose of toys that start to break or have pieces torn off. For dogs who are rougher on toys, choose more durable toys and toys that don't have sewn pieces that can easily be chewed off. Choose toys made of materials originating from nature, that are non-toxic, organically grown, and dyed with natural coloring.
- **Train your dog not to destroy stuffed toys.** Understand that dogs naturally enjoy toys they can pull apart and destroy (especially squeaker toys) or those that are edible, probably because they view toys as prey. The contents of these toys, such as squeakers, can be a choking hazard or dangerous if ingested, so training your dog not to destroy toys is important. (Dogs should also not be left unsupervised with this kind of toy.) The second your dog starts ripping or chewing with the intent to destroy the toy, firmly say "No" (or a similar word – but be consistent) and take the toy away. Option: you can, at this point, swap the stuffed toy for a tough chew toy.

- **Ask your veterinarian what chew toys are safe and appropriate for your pet.** Some vets recommend against all hard chews as they can crack dogs' teeth and may pose choking hazards. Ingestible "chew toys" like rawhide, pig's ears, bully sticks, commercial bones, etc. are not regulated, are often produced overseas, and the ingredients are unknown. For a safer and longer-lasting alternative, consider toys made of very hard rubber. All ingestible chew toys should be supervised.
- **Choose size-appropriate toys.** Toys should be appropriate for your dog's current size. Avoid balls and other toys that are too small; they can easily be swallowed or become lodged in your dog's mouth or throat.



Types of Toys

While some toys can keep a bored dog occupied without your involvement, playing with you will always be the most fun of all. Provide your dog with different kinds of toys and rotate toys and chews to keep them interesting. Interactive toys, in particular, will help keep your dog mentally stimulated. Let your dog's enthusiasm guide you toward the toys he or she truly enjoys.

- **Hard Rubber Chew Toys:** All dogs need regular tasks to solve to stay happy. Dogs are genetically programmed to hunt for food and durable toys that can be stuffed with food provide stimulation, mimicking nature by creating a problem for your dog to solve – specifically how to get to his food. [Kong®](#) is probably the most recognized brand, but [West Paw™](#) also makes highly durable rubber toys meant to be stuffed with treats. The right size Kong® or Zogoflex® toy can keep a puppy or dog busy for hours. Only by chewing diligently can your dog access the treats, and then only in small bits - very rewarding! There are dozens of creative food-acquisition challenges you can create for your dog with these toys. KONG toys can be easy or difficult food problems; match the complexity to your dog's level of experience and temperament. A favorite filler here at The Animal Foundation is peanut butter and in the summer we make "Kongsicles" by freezing the peanut butter. Both Kongs® and Zogoflex® are dishwasher safe and should be cleaned regularly. Visit the Kong company website for recipe ideas at <http://www.kongcompany.com>.
- **Nylabones:** The original Nylabones are made from pure virgin nylon and generally are considered a safe alternative to rawhide and some other digestible chews. They will not splinter or break off in chunks but can be worn down or chewed off in very small fibers that are easily passed through the digestive system. Here's a helpful hint if your dog isn't interested: Roughen the edges so it looks like another dog enjoyed it first, and then rub peanut butter or squeeze cheese into the crevasses.
- **Knotted Ropes:** Chewing a knotted rope can massage gums and keep your dog's teeth clean, plus there's the added play value of tossing and pouncing! Some come with rubber toys or tennis balls added for even more fun. You can hide treats in the knots to encourage your dog and add interest.



- **Food-Dispensing Puzzle Toys:** Kongs, of course, are the original “puzzle toy” but there is a plethora of options out there today that can offer your dog valuable mental stimulation and vary in complexity. These food- or treat-based and require your dog to find hidden treats that are often released through interaction such as tipping, turning, or rolling.
- **Plush Hide-and-Seek Puzzle Toys:** These puzzle toys do not use food. Instead a series of small squeak toys are “hidden” inside a larger plush toy and the dog has to “dig” them out. Hide-a-Squirrel is probably the most well-known but there are many other variations.
- **Fleece Toys:** Almost all dogs seem to be smitten with stuffed toys. Hunting breeds like retrievers and Labradors may be particularly drawn to them and are often content just to carry them around in their mouths. Shepherds and terriers may be more prone to view them as prey and want to tear them apart. Training can mitigate this but you can still end up with a lot of destroyed toys, so buy durable ones and those with replaceable squeakers, and rotate toys regularly. Also supervise your dog to make sure she’s not eating anything she shouldn’t be!
- **Automatic Ball-Launchers:** If your dog loves playing ball, this may be the toy for him or her. Features on the various brands and models vary. Most have adjustable distance settings and have AC adaptors and are battery powered. Three popular brands are iFetch, GoDogGo and PetSafe.
- **Huge Balls:** Herding breeds especially love playing soccer – alone or with you. Small dogs, particularly terriers, can also be highly entertained with oversized balls.
- **A Suspended Ball:** Remember playing tether ball as a kid? Many dogs also enjoy this game, especially boxers and bully dog breeds.
- **A Kid’s Wading Pool:** Water-loving breeds will delight in spending hot summer days in the splash zone.

Remember that interactive play is very important for your dog because he or she needs active “people time.” By focusing on a specific task, like repeatedly returning a ball or Frisbee, or playing “hide-and-seek” with treats or toys, your dog can expel pent-up mental and physical energy. This greatly reduces stress due to confinement, isolation and/or boredom. For young, high-energy and untrained dogs, interactive play also offers an opportunity for socialization and helps them learn about appropriate and inappropriate behavior with people and with other animals.

Activities

Although dogs love toys, sharing activities, dog sports, a session of playtime or even obedience training with you (when handled with patience and positive reinforcement) will be far more stimulating to your pup than any toy ever could be.

Dogs look forward to learning new behaviors, so teaching your dog new games and tricks can improve his disposition. Regular training sessions provide your dog with one-on-one attention, something he adores, and can even eliminate bouts of frustration and confusion. As he better understands what you want and expect, he'll grow more relaxed, comfortable and confident.

Training and Tricks: Having short training sessions several times throughout the day on basic obedience and manners can really help strengthen behaviors and help work the mind. There are several ways to teach dogs tricks using positive reinforcement. You and your dog can be as creative as you'd like by coming up with your own tricks, but if you need some ideas, there are plenty of training videos and articles online. Consider taking a group obedience class since obedience training is as much about your understanding how dogs think as it is about training your dog!

Find It: Treasure hunting games, or "scent games," can provide great mental enrichment. Start simple by tossing treats and asking your dog to "Find It" until he learns the cue. Then make it a little more difficult to find the treats, bones, or treat-dispensing toys. "Found" toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is blatantly introduced. Making an interactive game out of finding toys or treats is a good "rainy day" activity for your dog, using up energy without the need for a lot of space. For advanced learners, name the toys and eventually he or she will be able to retrieve them by name.

Hide & Seek: A good hide-and-seek game will not only entertain your dog, it's an excellent exercise for building reliable recalls. If you have taught your dog the "wait" command, you can have him wait while you go hide. When you call your dog to you, he'll love the mental stimulation as he searches for you. Don't forget to reward him with a treat or a good play session! Another way to play is by having a family member hide, have them call "come!" and send the dog to find them - start out easy and make it more and more difficult day by day. Play this game in the dark to encourage your dog to use his sense of smell.



- **Retrieving:** When teaching a dog to retrieve, remember it's important to offer affection, treats, or play for retrieving the chosen object. Encourage your dog to go after the item you want fetched. When your dog grabs it, reward him or her with the motivator of choice, then take the object away. Repeat this a few times, then toss the object a short distance. When your dog goes for it, immediately offer a reward. Repeat the process until you can reliably toss the object and get your dog to chase it. On rainy days you can play indoors. If you live in a house with stairs, play fetch up and down the stairs for an added workout.

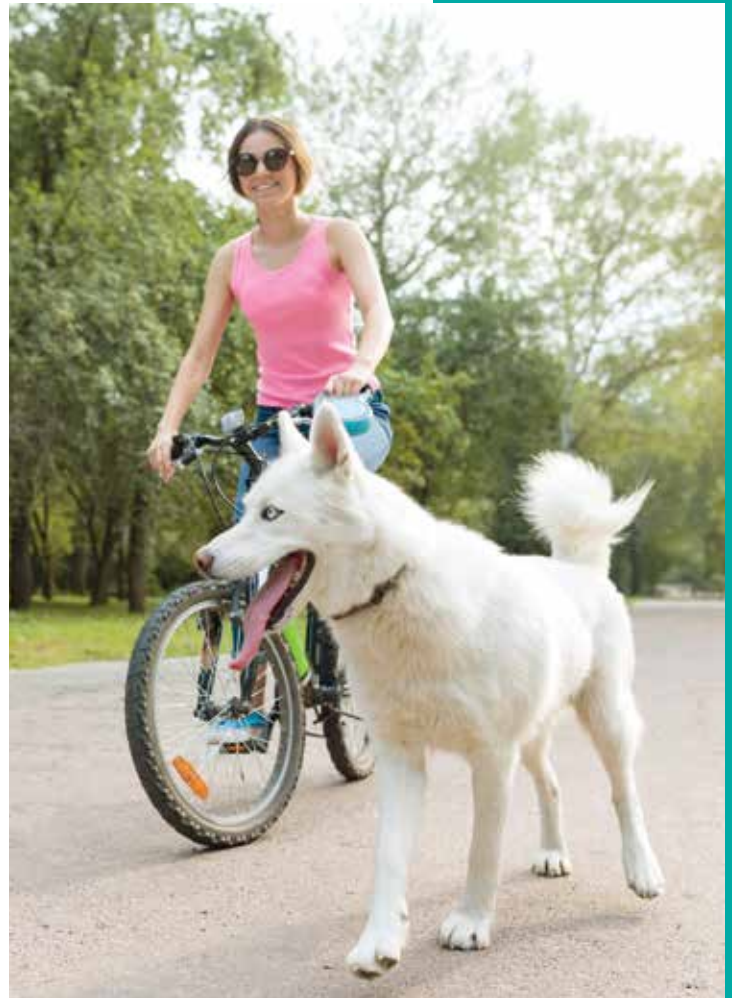
- **Retrieving a Dog Disc (Frisbee):** Start by having your dog sit or stand a foot or so away and handing the disc off then taking it back immediately so your dog can get used to the feel of the disc in his or her mouth. Increase the distance gradually. Roll the disc on end and let your dog "catch" it this way in the beginning. From here you can "graduate" to throwing. There are many training videos available that can give you pointers on teaching your dog to play with a flying disc.

- **Jogging:** If your dog actually has the energy and stamina to trot beside of you as you bike, great! Start slow and build distance gradually. Seek out soft surfaces and short distances for young dogs. Be sure to check paw pads before and after every run and avoid times of peak heat during the day.

- **Bike Riding:**

- If you are an experienced and regular bike rider, you may want to consider bring your dog along on some of your outings. Make sure your dog is already well trained in basic commands. You may need to teach him some more commands for this activity related to slowing down, stopping, and turning. The two most important things to remember are to take it slow and to always put safety first. We recommend visiting with your vet first prior to starting a new exercise routine that takes energy and stamina. Having the right equipment is also important. A hands-free bike leash keeps your dog at a safe distance from the wheels while in motion and can minimize the chances of unwanted tugging and accidents. Any leash should attach to a harness, not a collar, and a reflective vest is recommended for visibility.

- Start by walking your bike with you on one side and the dog on the other to get him acquainted with being attached to a bike. When you do ride, be sure not to peddle too fast for your dog. Keep your rides short and easy and very gradually build distance. Do not allow your dog to overexert himself.



- **Swimming:** Hitting the pool is a great way to cool off. Remember, though, that not all dogs naturally know how to swim! Doggy life jackets are a good idea, especially when boating. Remember that swimming pools are strictly off-limits to unsupervised dogs.
- **Playdates:** While they require some additional supervision, especially in the early introductory stage, play sessions with other dogs can be your pet's ticket to bliss. Here are some quick tips on how to introduce two new dogs to one another:
 - Walk the dogs on-leash side by side on neutral territory. Keep 10 feet between them.
 - Next, let the dogs meet on leash. Walk the two dogs close together, allowing them to sniff one another. If they show no signs of aggression, have the dogs meet with leashes dragging.
 - Avoid closely confined spaces. The more room the dogs have to move, the less tension there will be.
 - Wait two minutes while they sniff each other, then call them away and move around. If they start to play and it seems to be going well, let them continue a few minutes and then end the session.
 - Finally, have the dogs meet at home. Keep each interaction short and pleasant. If signs of tension arise, separate the dogs immediately and try again later.



- **Animal-Assisted Therapy:** Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is the use of certified therapy animals as a part of a therapeutic plan. Dog-handler teams visit hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living centers, children's homes, and other similar facilities to help lift spirits and facilitate recovery. Although dogs make up the majority of therapy animals, other animals such as rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, and even pigs can become therapy animals. Dogs of any breed, size, or age may be eligible to become therapy dogs. [The AKC Canine Good Citizen Program \(CGC\)](#) certification is a prerequisite for many therapy dog programs. There are a number of official animal assisted therapy organizations. Two internationally recognized groups are [Pet Partners](#) and [Therapy Dogs International](#).



Dog Sports

Many people are unaware of the number of organized dog sports there are that you and your dog can become involved in. The most important thing to remember when you get involved in a dog sport is that it's about the journey. While competing and winning is fun, the point is having an organized activity that you and your dog enjoy together. Often people get discouraged and quite because a sport can take many months to learn. This is a shame because your dog doesn't care about how good they are at the sport or if they win. For them, it's all the mental and physical stimulation and being with you.

There are a wide variety of dog so there's bound to be one that's just right for you and your dog. Here are just a few examples of the more popular dog sports.



- **Agility:** A handler directs a dog through an obstacle course featuring jumps, hurdles, tunnels, weave poles, a teeter-totter and an a-frame in a race for both time and accuracy. Dogs run off leash with no food or toys as incentives, and the handler can touch neither dog nor obstacles. There are two leagues, USDDA (United States Dog Agility Association, Inc.) and the NADAC (North American Dog Agility Council).
- **AKC /UKC Obedience Trials:** Dogs are judged on precision and response to commands. Obedience competitions begin with exercises such as walking on a leash at the owner's side, sitting and lying down with distractions, and coming when called. Advanced classes prove the owner's ability to train the dog to do a variety of "tricks," such as fetching, jumping obstacles, and tracking. The goal is to create a working team, a partnership where both human and canine are working in sync.
- **Canine Freestyle:** Commonly called "dog dancing," canine freestyle is a choreographed musical performance by a dog/handler team. This sport involves training your dog to do a series of tricks such as walking backwards, jumping, weaving in and out of your legs and moving in sync with you. These tricks are then put together as a routine to music. The sky is the limit on dog/handler team creativity, as just about any move is allowed as long as it doesn't put your dog or you in danger. To learn more about the sport or for those interested in competing, there are two leagues for canine freestyle, the Canine Freestyle Federation and WCFO (World Canine Freestyle Organization, Inc.).
- **Dock Jumping:** Dock jumping is a canine sport in which dogs are enticed to run the length of a dock and leap as far out into the water as possible to compete for height or distance. They're motivated to fly with a prized toy, which is thrown just out of reach to help them keep their momentum and get the best launch angle possible. The competitive league in the United States is DogDogs.

- **Dog Disc Sports:** Perhaps the easiest dog sports to get involved in because throwing and practicing with a disc is something you can do in your own backyard. Distance/Accuracy is the foundation of the sport and is a competition where a dog and handler score points by completing as many catches as possible on a field with marked scoring zones in an allotted time. Freestyle is also a timed event where a handler and dog perform a routine of tricks, throws, and catches to music using multiple discs. The two major leagues in dog disc sports are Skyhoundz and UFO. The Skyhoundz website offers training videos for sale.
- **Flyball:** A dog relay race that involves four dogs and handlers per team, dogs are taught to run a 51-foot course that features four hurdles spaced 10-feet apart. Fifteen feet from the fourth hurdle is a box that releases a tennis ball when the dog lands on the angled pad. The dog catches the ball and then runs back over the hurdles to the finish/starting line, where the next dog is released. The first team to have all four dogs complete the course with no errors wins. Flyball is a sport of milliseconds. There are two competitive leagues, North American Flyball Association (NAFA) and the United Flyball League International (UFLI).



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