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.

Here are a few tips on how to keep your dog entertained and happy:

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 exacerbating joint problems swimming is a fantastic non-weight bearing exercise.

For dogs that are a little worried by new events, unfamiliar people, places or animals a ‘couch day’ once per week can help to calm and settle a nervous dog. Typically ‘couch days’ are ‘chill out’ days where no training or strenuous exercise takes place and the dog is left to rest and relax. Just like our need to sometimes watch a DVD or read a good book, our dogs 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, puzzle cubes, 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. Kongs are enjoyed by most dogs and provide a challenge and good chewing experience. It is important to rotate the toys on a daily 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. This will ensure that your dog is always willing to play and amuse him/herself with the toys that you provide.

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.
Use Food to Entertain

- Food can be fully hand fed, with food used as rewards throughout the day when your dog behaves appropriately.
- 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 bones or raw hides, this can provide your dog with hours of valuable appropriate chewing activity.
- Food can also be used in certain dog toys, such as treat balls, buster cubes or Kongs.
- 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.
- Use cardboard tubes (toilet paper rolls, empty glad wrap rolls) containing treats, rolled up in paper.
- Piñata for dogs - 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

To make a treat bottle:

1. Simply take the lid, plastic ring and labels off a 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 gravy powder for additional flavour.
3. Freeze.
4. Once frozen tip the ice treat out of the container for your dog to enjoy.
Kongs
Kongs are a fantastic way to give your dog something appropriate to chew on, while enjoying a nice and long lasting cool treat. Why not try stuffing a Kong with some raw chicken wings or chicken necks. Put the Kong into the freezer for a few hours before offering this cool summer entertainment toy. After use simply wash out and the Kong is ready for re-use.

(For more information and ideas see our Kong information sheet).

Chewing problems?
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.

Amusement Areas at Home

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.

Sound
Try leaving a radio 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.