

The Focus Guide to Enrichment





Table of Contents

What is Enrichment? 01

How Does Enrichment Influence Behaviour? 02

Instinctual Behaviours 03

Enrichment Feeding 04

DIY Enrichment Games 05

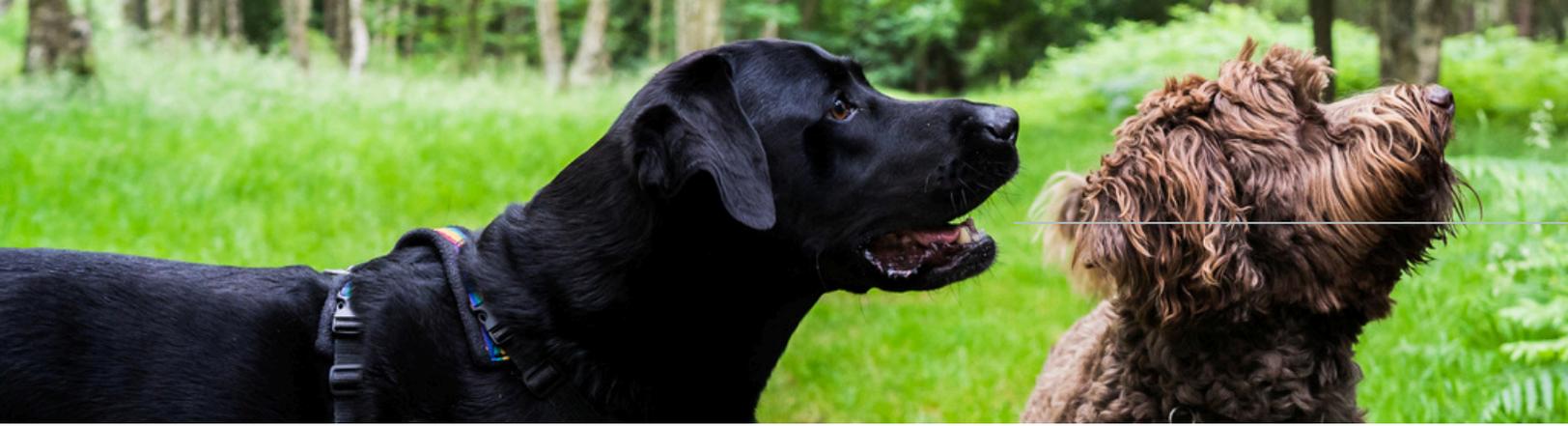
Breed Specific Outlets 07

Safety 08

Health and Veterinary Care 09

Nutrition 10

Sleep 11



What is enrichment?

“Enrichment is what dogs need to be behaviourally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively healthy”

If you've ever watched TV programs about zoos, you'll know keepers set up the enclosures in ways that encourage natural behaviours. They also often feed animals in ways that encourage them to forage and problem solve.

Our dogs are captive animals too. And even though they've been domesticated for thousands of years they are still driven to perform a series of natural behaviours. When we don't provide outlets for these behaviours, this can lead to behaviour problems as dogs attempt to meet their own needs.

However, canine enrichment is not all about food and toys, it's also about ensuring dogs are emotionally, physically, and cognitively enriched. It's about helping them thrive, rather than just survive.

How does enrichment influence behaviour?

Behaviour is often a symptom of a problem, rather than the problem itself. A lot of the time what humans view as 'problem' behaviours stem from dogs attempts to communicate that they have an unmet need, or an attempt to fulfill that need for themselves.

Before we start training it's important to make sure **all** of our dogs enrichment needs are being met

Enrichment needs include:



Instinctual behaviours

What behaviours come naturally to dogs?

Sniffing

Digging

Resting

Foraging

Chasing

Problem solving

Shredding

Retrieving

Stalking

Chewing

Socialising

All dogs will have some level of drive to perform these behaviours. Due to selective breeding some dogs will be more driven to do some of these behaviours than others. For example labradors usually love holding things in their mouths, sniffing and chewing, whereas terriers often prefer to dig, chase and shred.

Important Note: The dog decides what's enriching to them! If they don't enjoy the activity or they find it frustrating then that activity isn't enriching for them!

With any activity we introduce, it's essential we monitor it's effects. For example, for dogs that enjoy retrieving, fetch can be a great outlet, but we need to be mindful that it isn't leading to over arousal or frustration. This is the same for any activity, if a food puzzle is so hard it causes frustration, your dog won't experience positive effects.

Enrichment feeding

This is sometimes treated as the be all and end all of enrichment, but there is much more to ensuring our dogs are thriving than how we feed them. However, enrichment feeding is great for providing opportunities for our dogs to engage in instinctive behaviours, stimulating them mentally, providing decompression time and helping to lower arousal.

Scatter Feeding

Foraging & Sniffing

Enrichment feeding doesn't get easier than this. Grab your dogs kibble or some treats, scatter it in the grass or on the floor and let them search.



Lickmats, and Stuffable toys

Licking & chewing

Lickimats and stuffable toys like Kongs and toppls are great for wet and raw food. Licking and chewing helps dogs lower their heart rate and release tension. Start off easy and gradually increase the difficulty. If it's too difficult they'll lose interest.



Puzzle toys

Foraging, Problem Solving, & Sniffing

There are hundreds of puzzle toys on the market that get dogs problem solving in order to get their food. You can easily make your own by hiding treats in cardboard boxes and toilet roll tubes, which also gives them opportunities to shred! *Be careful not to start out too difficult or dogs will get frustrated.*



DIY Enrichment Games



Cardboard Chaos

Foraging, Shredding, Problem Solving, & Sniffing

This is our absolute favourite! Get a cardboard box and fill it with things like packing paper, loo roll tubes, and cereal boxes. Scatter some kibble or treats in there and let your dog have at it!

To make it more of a challenge, put treats inside the smaller boxes and fold them closed, or make treat parcels out of packing paper, the world is your Oyster!

Treat Search

Foraging, Sniffing, Problem Solving, & Shredding

Find a particularly stinky treat, hide it up, and send your dog to search for it. You can make it harder by making treat parcels out of toilet roll tubes and hiding those around the house or garden. *You can also do this with your dog's favourite toys, make sure the hiding places are really easy for your dog to find to start with to keep them motivated to search.*



Snuffle Towels

Sniffing, Foraging, Problem Solving, Digging

Lay out a towel and scatter some treats or kibble across it. Roll the towel into a sausage and send your dog to snuffle out those treats.

Once they've got the hang of unrolling the towel you can level up by tying the towel in a knot.



Lettuce shredding

Foraging, Shredding, & Sniffing

Yes you read that right. If your dog tends to eat inedible things encourage them to shred something edible like a lettuce. Some dogs will go for it straight away, others might need you to hide some treats in the leaves to get them interested! Cabbages work well for this too!

Digging box

Digging, Foraging, & Sniffing

Some dogs love nothing more than a good dig and if you want to save your flower beds giving them an appropriate place to dig is the best bit. Buy a kids sand pit or section off a part of your garden you're willing to sacrifice!



Snuffle Tin

Sniffing, Foraging, & Problem Solving.

Get yourself a muffin tin, pop something edible in each section and cover the sections with a ball or toy. You can cover the food with anything that fits in sections, get creative!

Sausage bobbing

Sniffing & Problem Solving.

Find a big container or paddling pool and fill it with water. Drop in some sausages for your dog to 'bob' for. You can also use any toys or food that will float. Save this one for the summer months.



Breed Specific Outlets

What was your dog bred to do? Herding, retrieving, tracking, hunting? Over the years humans have bred dogs for a myriad of different purposes meaning that dogs are often incredibly motivated to do the things they were bred to do, if they don't have an outlet for this, we often see an increase in frustration. If you're unsure what your dog was bred to do search online!

Now we're not saying just because you have a Border Collie you also need a flock of sheep for them to herd, or to let your terrier loose in the woods to find some rats. But we do need to find activities that allow our dogs to practise the behaviours they're naturally driven to engage in.

Here are some examples:

- Scent detection
- Herding games
- Tuggy
- Retrieve games
- Scent tracking or trailing
- Chasing toys
- Digging



Safety

Does your dog feel safe?

Imagine something that scares you. For me, it's spiders, I know it's irrational, I know the house spiders in the UK pose me no risk at all, but I still feel scared every time I see one.

Imagine if every time you left the house you were confronted with the thing that scared you. Sometimes it was off in the distance, sometimes it ran at you, and sometimes it appeared suddenly around a corner. You wouldn't feel very safe going outside would you?

Now imagine if that thing appeared in your house with no warning. You didn't know when it was going to appear, you could be asleep, eating, watching TV and the thing would appear. How safe would you feel in your home?

Now think about your dog, is there something that scares them? Maybe it's dogs, people, loud noises, or traffic. Do they experience these things regularly either at home or on a walk? If they do they probably don't feel very safe.

Feeling safe is not only essential for our dogs emotional wellbeing, but it's essential if we want them to learn new coping strategies or change how they feel about a situation or thing.

So how do we improve feelings of safety?

The first step is to reduce, as much as possible, their exposure to things that make them feel fearful. Something as simple as changing your walk location to avoid busy parks or traffic can make a significant difference in how safe your dog feels.

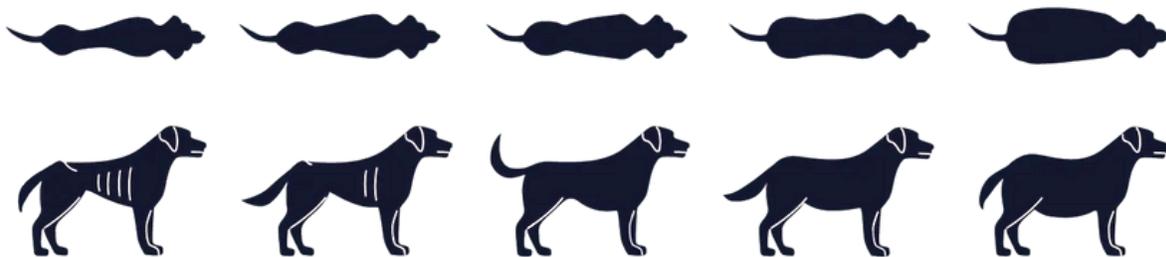
Health and Veterinary care

Physical Health

Physical health has a **huge** impact on behaviour. Before embarking on any training make sure you check to see if your dog is in pain or discomfort. Behaviour changes are often the first sign dogs are experiencing pain.

Body Condition

Being both over and underweight comes with health risks. Being overweight also increases inflammation in joints which can lead to pain.



Under Ideal

Ideal

Over Ideal

Ideal Body Condition

- Ribs should be relatively easy to feel with minimal fat covering.
- When looking at them from above they should have a visible waist
- Their abdomen should be tucked

Nutrition

What dogs eat has a huge impact on their physical wellbeing and their behaviour. Gut health and brain health are directly linked so the healthier the gut the better equipped your dog is to learn new skills.

All dogs are individuals and there is no one size fits all diet for dogs. The best we can do as owners is start by finding the highest quality food that fits our budget

www.allaboutdogfood.co.uk is a super website which gives a nutritional rating to pretty much every dog food in the UK. Sort by quality and then scroll down until you find your price range. You can also use it to check the nutritional rating of their current food.

Treats and Chews also play a roll in gut health. We like to stick to natural chews and use whole foods for rewards where possible.

If your dog has a consistently upset tummy, allergies or intolerances, then it's always worth speaking to your vet or a qualified nutritionist for advise.





Sleep

Sleep is one of the most important contributors to physical and behavioural health.

- Sleep is essential for emotional, physical, and cognitive health.
- Sleep helps every cell and organ in the body function correctly
- Sleep allows dogs to process learning and emotions

The amount of sleep a dog needs varies depending on their developmental stage...



That's a lot of sleep! But it's really important we ensure dogs' sleep needs are being met.

A lack of sleep can lead to emotional dysregulation, difficulty retaining and processing information, struggles with impulse control, hypervigilance, increased anxiety, lack of focus, and overexcitability.