Canine Enrichment

Thomas J. O'Connor
Animal Control & Adoption Center

MARIANNE INGRID MONER, MNM

Volunteer & Education Coordinator
Certified Dog Bite Prevention Educator

Welcome!

This mini workshop provides an overview of enrichment, as well as practical examples for community members as well as the shelter environment.

Enrichment is a fun way to broaden a dog's world, build confidence, and increase the animal-human bond. The slides in this mini workshop can help folks implement enrichment activities at home as well as at the shelter. Feel free to share your ideas, you never know what we can accomplish!

Definition of Enrichment

‘**Enrichment**’ is the term given to improving an animal’s quality of life:

1. By making the environment more complex and dynamic
2. By providing mental and physical stimulation

Often, enrichment mimics an animal’s natural ‘wild’ existence, including hunting for food, stimulating the senses, and providing variety. Enrichment allows an animal the most often forgotten of the ‘**five freedoms**’ – the freedom to express natural behavior.

The Five Freedoms

1. **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst**: by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor.
2. **Freedom from Discomfort**: by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. **Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease**: by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
4. **Freedom to Express Normal Behavior**: by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind. *(For some dogs, unfamiliar dogs are a trigger).*
5. **Freedom from Fear and Distress**: by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

‘When doing NOTHING is doing SOMETHING’ *MaryKaye Kendrick*

In the shelter environment, dogs often struggle with over-arousal and anxiety. Sometimes, doing ‘nothing’ but **connecting with a worried dog is more important than offering an activity**. This article is a crucial read for anyone who works with/owns dogs who struggle with over-arousal.

Read full article below:

https://petharmonytraining.com/when-doing-nothing-is-doing-something/

What is Over-Arousal?

Over arousal/anxiety can take many forms:

- Mouthiness
- Panting (out of context - when not tired or hot)
- Leash biting
- Humping
- Jumping
- Pacing
- Barking
- Fidgeting

**Not to be confused with normal puppy behavior*

How to handle Jumping/Humping

Please never shove or push a dog off, confrontational efforts fail to teach the dog what you're asking, and has the potential to trigger a bite with a dog who is already over threshold.

Instead: Angle your body (don't fully turn your back) and wait until all paws are on the ground. Once paws are on the ground, scatter high value treats. Try to anticipate when a dog is approaching to jump/hump, and toss treats before it occurs so the pup learns great things happen without putting paws on us.

Over-Arousal and Physical Exercise

All dogs should have an **appropriate** level of exercise for the individual's needs, combined with plenty of **mental enrichment**. Using the brain and engaging the senses are just as tiring as physical exercise, while meeting a dog's needs, building confidence, and preventing boredom.

Excessive physical exercise that lacks variety can not only cause injury, the increase in adrenaline can intensify over-arousal & anxiety, and create a dependence on intense levels of exercise (in other words, it has the opposite effect) - leaving a dog unable to settle or relax. Please avoid repeatedly playing games like fetch or using a chuck-it, and put the emphasis on mental enrichment for dogs who are showing signs of over-arousal.

Enrichment

Pitfalls

What Enrichment Isn't

-Causing physical or mental **exhaustion** - the myth of 'a tired dog is a happy dog.'

-Causing **frustration** when enrichment is too difficult, or unsuitable for the specific dog (size, type, shape, activity….)

Enrichment, like sources of fear, is determined by the individual. We may have ideas about what will be enriching and satisfying, but we need to observe dogs to see if the activity is enjoyable, frustrating, scary, or uninteresting, so we can adjust accordingly. Enrichment should also be safe - avoid choking hazards or activities that may cause injury. Supervision is ideal - in a shelter environment, when supervision isn't possible, enrichment choices should be as safe as possible.

Start **SIMPLE**, observe, and provide hints if necessary.

Is a Tired Dog a Happy Dog?

When we're exhausted, we may have trouble concentrating, we may feel cranky, we may be sore or experiencing pain, we may not want to do anything or have anyone bother us….**dogs experience unpleasant effects of exhaustion as well,** and exhaustion is an unhealthy state. While exercise is important for all sentient beings, exercise should ***match (not exceed)*** the needs and abilities of individual dogs to avoid creating new physical and/or behavioral problems. Enrichment, including teaching new skills, should leave a dog wanting more.

Source: 'dogs require daily enrichment'

Excerpt: "I often hear from owners they have a "high energy" dog who engages in annoying behaviors such as excessive barking, chewing, jumping on people, and general inability to settle down.

Very often the first recourse applied by pet owners is to greatly increase daily exercise to tire their dog. Maximizing daily exercise results in short-term exhaustion but ironically, sustained over-arousal may worsen behavior in the long-term. Using exhaustive physical activity to "tire" a hyper-aroused dog such as playing fetch for an hour each day may cause the adrenal gland to become enlarged (1) thus pumping even more adrenaline into the dog's system resulting in a higher baseline of arousal.

Exhaustion and relaxation are not the same."

Please read the full article below:
www.petprofessionalguild.com/barks/barks-magazine-blog/dogs-require-daily-enrichment/

Thomas J. O'Connor
Animal Control & Adoption Center

Types of Enrichment

Natural Behaviors

Enrichment Mimics Natural behaviors, and provides an appropriate outlet

-Digging

-Chasing

-Hunting

-Eating / Foraging

-Problem solving

-Physical activity

-Social Engagement

Types of Enrichment

These types of enrichment provide outlets to natural behaviors

-Food enrichment

-Cognitive enrichment

-Physical enrichment

-Social enrichment

-sensory enrichment

Enrichment

Examples

(examples in **bold** are suitable for a shelter environment)

Food Puzzles

Every dog has to eat — and most of us have plenty of things already lying around the house that we can use to spruce up their meals. It's often low effort but high impact.

Some examples of food enrichment for your dog:

- **Stuffed kongs (freezing them increases the difficulty when appropriate)**
- **Other frozen treats**
- **Scatter feeding their kibble (in grass or snuffle mat)**
- **Puzzle feeders, food-dispensing balls, or lick mats specifically designed to test our dogs' skills (cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, blankets, towels, and plastic bottles can be used to create simple homemade puzzles)**
- **Food searches where you hide a portion of meals, or favorite treats around the house (or outdoor kennel) to create a nose work game (bonus if they're smelly at first to make them easier to find)**

Source: Positive Dog Training | Unleashed Joy Dog Training | Maryland

Note About Food

My dog isn't
'Food motivated'

Many of you have probably heard someone say their dog isn't 'food motivated.' All dogs are food motivated, dogs have to eat or they will die. Most of the time, when dogs show limited interest in food there's a reason such as anxiety, distractions, they've eaten a large meal already, they're in pain/medical issue, or the food isn't high value enough. If a dog shows little interest in food, consider the difficulty of the activity, and then observe whether or not something else is interfering with the dog's interest.

Cognitive Enrichment

Giving our dog's **problem-solving challenges** is a great way to productively wear them out *and* build relevant skills for navigating the world around us! These activities are commonly called **mental stimulation**. At their best, they work both our pets' bodies and their brains.

Some examples of cognitive enrichment for your dog:

- Formal classes to learn new skills, rally, or **agility** ***(small scale agility may be possible at the shelter)***
- At-home training sessions
- **Learning new tricks and behaviors, like hand targeting, recall games (may require 2 people)**
- **Impulse control exercises, like leaving treats or waiting to chase a toy**
- **Nose work**
- **Puzzle toys**
- **Anything else that requires mental focus**

Source: Positive Dog Training | Unleashed Joy Dog Training | Maryland

Physical Enrichment

We addressed the potential dangers of too much physical activity without appropriate mental outlets. But there's no denying that exercise ***is*** important for our dogs to live their best lives! The key is to vary the type, length, and intensity of their activities to avoid creating a bored "super athlete."

Some examples of physical enrichment for your dog *tug of war and flirt poles require structure - learning to let go and impulse control using positive reinforcement:

- **Flirt poles or spring poles**
- **Interactive games like fetch or tug-of-war**
- Physical play like wrestling with you or other dogs while observing body language
- Dog sports like skijoring, flyball, and more (be sure to check with vet and build stamina!!)
- **Homemade obstacle or agility courses**
- Canine conditioning exercises
- **A designated dig area **this could be a volunteer project***
- **Paper shredding or lettuce/cabbage shredding for dogs who ingest a lot of material**

Source: Positive Dog Training | Unleashed Joy Dog Training | Maryland

Social Enrichment

Dogs are social mammals. While not every dog loves strange people or other animals — and there's absolutely no reason they need to! — it *is* important to provide our pets with plenty of opportunities to interact ***safely*** with family members and friends. Be sure to watch body language for signs of discomfort or stress.

Some examples of social enrichment for your dog:

- Hide and seek with you
- Playdates with other dogs *if they enjoy their company*
- **Social play with family members (home) volunteers (shelter)**
- **Intentional social time (like giving a canine massage)**

Source: Positive Dog Training | Unleashed Joy Dog Training | Maryland

Sensory Enrichment

Our dogs have the same main senses we do (though their abilities differ — human eyes are better in the daylight while canine noses and ears put our own to shame). To change up your dog's enrichment, spend some time thinking about what they see, hear, smell, taste, and feel! (After all, variety is the spice of life.)

Some examples of sensory enrichment for your dog:

- **Sitting while leashed, watching the world go by in a public space (parks are great for this)** - *this can still be accomplished outside, either in an outdoor kennel, or on the TJO property with appropriate dogs.*
- **Varying the type, size, and taste of the treats they eat**
- **Using lots of different materials to make your own puzzle toys**
- **Rolling in the grass**
- **Playing bird sounds or gentle wind chimes (smart phone can be used, be aware of dog's reaction)**
- Setting up a sensory scent garden in your yard with dog-friendly herbs

Source: Positive Dog Training | Unleashed Joy Dog Training | Maryland

At the Shelter & DIY Examples

At the Shelter & home

Volunteers and owners should add enrichment **during walks**, or in the shelter - come in specifically to prepare and provide food/puzzle toys while dogs are in their kennels. Both are great ways to reduce stress. During walking shifts volunteers can spend some time in the outdoor kennels with more elaborate food puzzles, scattering kibble in the grass to forage, allowing them to simply sniff on walks (sniffari), teaching a hand target (I'll review hand targeting in person). Lots of options.

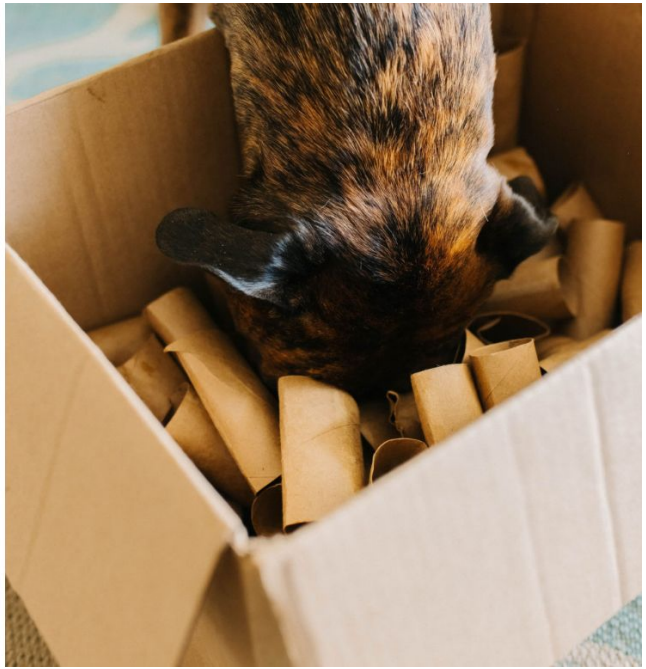
Interested in volunteering? Please visit the Volunteer page:
www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/volunteer

DIY Food Puzzles

Kibble in a towel - roll towel up and let dog unroll the towel to find treats.

Tennis balls, a muffin tin, and hidden treats. My dog loves this!

DIY Food Puzzles

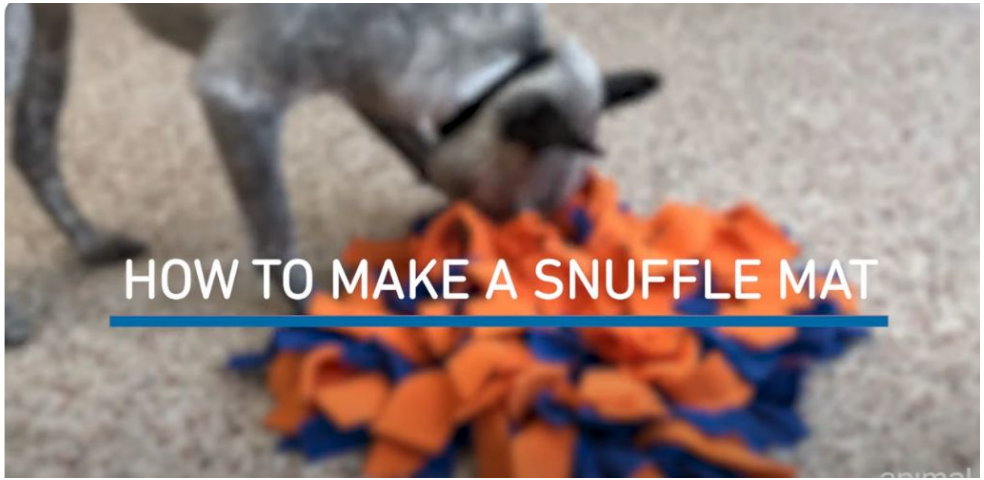


This website has great toilet paper roll ideas. The individual rolls can be filled with treats and folded shut for increased difficulty, or used in several other ways as shown here:

3 Dog Enrichment Activities Using Toilet Paper Rolls (sparklesandsunshineblog.com)

Thomas J. O'Connor
Animal Control & Adoption Center

Snuffle Mats



https://youtu.be/nTkWG01vNu0?feature=shared

Snuffle mats can be made or purchased. Snuffle balls can also be made or purchased, with lots of twists on the same theme.

Thomas J. O'Connor
Animal Control & Adoption Center

DIY Agility Examples

Source: [9 DIY Dog Agility Course Plans You Can Make Today (With Pictures) | Pet Keen]

Thomas J. O'Connor
Animal Control & Adoption Center

Resources & Interesting Reads

Links for those who want to explore further

For questions about information in this material please email:
mmoner@tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com

[5 Great Ways to Reframe Your Laziness As Canine Enrichment — Dog Training with Kristi Benson]

[How to Train Your Dog to do a Hand Target — Dog Training with Kristi Benson]

[Canine Enrichment Ideas | Facebook]

[Canine Enrichment | Facebook]

[Is That Enrichment Toy Enriching? Not So Much. - eileenanddogs]

Thomas J. O'Connor
Animal Control & Adoption Center

HAVE FUN!

Thank you for adding enrichment
to dogs' lives

Interested in volunteering?
Please visit the Volunteer page:
www.tjoconnoradoptioncenter.com/volunteer