

## Shelter Dog Enrichment

Life in a shelter is stressful for dogs, even the most humane shelter. Factors contributing to stress are unfortunately part of everyday life in many shelters. They include (Jones, 2011):

- Separation from family members
- Strong or unusual odors and sounds
- Unfamiliar people
- Limited ability to make choices or escape
- Inability to rest
- Social isolation
- Inadequate mental and physical stimulation

Signs of stress include barking, jumping, or cowering in the back of the kennel. Chronic stress can result in repetitive activities that are not goal-directed, such as spinning, digging, pacing, and licking kennel doors. Dogs might become frustrated by people passing their kennels, resulting in lunging and barking at the kennel doors.

A variety of enrichment activities can lower stress for shelter dogs, in turn decreasing their vulnerability to physical illness, improving kennel behavior and adoptability, and enhancing their quality of life.

Enrichment includes any housing change, toy/object, or activity that (Marsden, 2009):

- Encourages engagement in species-specific activity
- Relieves stress or boredom
- Improves quality of life
- Decreases destructive behavior and frustration

Variety is the key to a good enrichment toolkit. True, most dogs love stuffed Kongs, but don't stop there regarding your enrichment options. Some examples and resources are listed below. You'll see that many enrichment strategies cost little or nothing!

Auditory enrichment:

- Through a Dog's Ear cds and other classical music
- Bird songs cds

Olfactory enrichment:

- Lavender or chamomile scents using spray bottles or aromatherapy diffusers
- Smelling the outdoors or other species

Tactile enrichment:

- Petting or massage
- Soft bedding

Physical enrichment:

- Food dispensing toys such as Kong Wobbler, frozen Kongs, and homemade PVC pipe toys (<http://ratherfetching.com/blog/2010/11/12/diy-enrichment-activities-for-dogs/>)
  - Nearly empty plastic peanut jars (supervise closely)
  - Chew toys
  - Nested cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, and packing paper with treats imbedded throughout for shredding and foraging
  - Doggie piñatas- attach a bungee cord to a plastic soda bottle, hang the bottle upside down from a kennel with kibble inside
  - Large doggie popsicles made by freezing low sodium broth, toys, and broken biscuits in a large bucket
- (<http://animalfarmfoundation.org/pages/Creative-Outlets>)

#### Mental enrichment:

- Interactive puzzles such as Ottosson toys
- Learning new behaviors with clicker training- leave it, keeping four paws on the floor, sit, targeting

Ideas such as these can jumpstart an enrichment program run by volunteers, and the public will love to see your shelter dogs during playtime!

#### Resources

Collingsworth, S. (2010) Everyday Enrichment for Dogs and Cats webinar, [http:// challenge.aspcapro.org/strategy/webinars/everyday-enrichment-dogs-and-cats](http://challenge.aspcapro.org/strategy/webinars/everyday-enrichment-dogs-and-cats)

Jones, K. (2011) Animal Stress and Research Behind It, Association of Pet Dog Trainers webinar.

Marsden, L. (2009) The Behavior Department: Enriching a Shelter Dog's Experience, Animal Sheltering, March-April, [http://www.animalsheltering.org/resource\\_library/magazine\\_articles/mar\\_apr\\_2009/the\\_behavior\\_department\\_enriching\\_a\\_shelter\\_dogs\\_experience.html](http://www.animalsheltering.org/resource_library/magazine_articles/mar_apr_2009/the_behavior_department_enriching_a_shelter_dogs_experience.html)

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