

Behavior Solutions: Play and Exercise

We all need a hobby or an outlet to focus our energies on, and dogs are no exception. A daily session of exercise or play helps to keep your dog healthy, physically and mentally. This time that you spend with your dog can help prevent problem behaviors from forming, as well as build a closer bond with your pet.

More than Just a Game

Exercise and play serve an important function in the life of your dog. A healthy dog normally has energy to spare, and a daily exercise or play session will help dispel some of that energy into something good for him, not destructive. Boredom behaviors, like chewing, digging or barking, can arise out of lack of sufficient activity. When your dog receives regular physical interaction he will be less likely to partake in destructive behaviors around the home. When you have to leave your dog home alone or confine him to a crate, be sure to allow him time to get energy out before leaving so that he rests while you are away instead of looking for something to do that could be inappropriate. Dogs are a pack animal, which means they need the interaction of their pack-- you and your family. Play and exercise are necessary and important ways that you can interact with your dog that helps to build your bond and expend energy.

The Dog Workout

In deciding what exercise is best for your dog, you must consider the breed, age, stamina, energy level, and overall health of your dog. A leisurely stroll around the block will suffice for some dogs, but it may be just a warm-up for some, and a grueling march for others. There are several exercise options for your dog and your only limit is what he enjoys and is capable of. Your dog can even be a part of your own exercise routine. Bring your dog along with you when you go for a jog, or ask a jogging friend if they would like canine company. Hiking can also be great exercise for your wilderness hound, and provides more scenery than your neighborhood. If you have a pool, let your dog take a dip and swim a few laps—this is a cool exercise option during warm summer months.

The breed of your dog can help determine generally how much exercise is needed for a happy companion. Typically, dogs that were bred to perform a certain job will require more exercise, as they may still retain the drive to keep moving. Dogs that were not bred to fulfill a certain function don't always have the energy or stamina that their working cousins do, so less exercise is required to keep them content. Breed types are only a general guideline, however, and you should gauge the amount of exercise needed for your dog based on his individual energy level.

Care should be taken in the exercise that you allow your older dog, young puppy, or dog with health problems to partake in. Exercise that is too strenuous for your dog could result in painful muscle or joint injuries. Consult with your veterinarian for advice on exercises appropriate for your dog. Older dogs tend to slow down and don't have the stamina that they once did, so adjusting of the kind of exercise and the length of sessions will help prevent them from becoming overly tired or injuring themselves. Since young puppies are still growing, their bones and muscles need time to build up before any strenuous exercise or lengthy routine is in place. If you plan to take your puppy out for walks, accustom him to wearing a collar and leash around your home before taking him out. For your puppy's safety, keep him away from unfamiliar dogs that could be unfriendly, as a bad experience can create a fearful association with other dogs. Always make sure that your dog or puppy is fully vaccinated before bringing him out in public. A daily exercise routine is more beneficial for your dog than just going out on the weekends. This will help keep your dog in top condition and overall more content, especially in times that he is inactive. Dogs that are exercised on an irregular basis are more prone to injury because they are possibly out of condition, or may overexert themselves due to the enthusiasm of being out. Warm-up exercises, like a short walk before beginning a jog, or stretching can help ward off injury.

The Games We Play

Each dog is an individual and will have preferences on how he likes to play. Some dogs like to play fetch with toys like the Starmark DuraFoam Disc™, while others like to play tug, or even just get out for a good run or swim. Don't force an activity on your dog if he doesn't enjoy playing that way—play sessions should be a carefree time that you both

enjoy. While tug is a good game to allow your dog to engage his mouth and exert a lot of energy, some may become overly excited or even show signs of aggression, so be sure that you remain in control of the game and that it ends when you choose. Swimming is also fun for many dogs, and a great form of exercise. Make sure that your dog has been properly introduced to water and is comfortable before expecting him to jump right in. As with exercise, care should be taken in how you play with your dog. While many dogs will continue playing out of enthusiasm, attention should be paid for signs of overexertion and overheating. Make sure that the play is not too strenuous and does not last longer than is enjoyable for your dog. Particularly in warm summer months, outdoor play should be limited or take place in the cooler times of day to ensure against overheating, dehydration and especially heat stroke. (Refer to Starmark's Behavior Solutions: Summer Pet Tips on www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com for more information on keeping your dog safe in the sun.)

Exercise for the Mind

Even though your dog gets plenty of physical stimulation, he also needs mental stimulation for his well being. One of the best ways to stimulate your dog's mind is through training. Training not only offers an effective way in which to communicate with your dog, it also keeps him thinking and strengthens your bond. Incorporate training during play or exercise sessions and make it part of your daily routine. Obedience training helps teach your dog what is expected of him and creates a mannerly pet that can be allowed more freedom instead of being isolated from his family.

The Pro Training Clicker™ and the Click and Play™, a clicker inside a toy, are great methods to train dogs of all ages, including puppies and even senior dogs. Both come with complete guides that show you how to teach your dog essential obedience exercises and even some fun tricks. Since the clicker is a reward based training method, your dog has to think about what he has to do in order to receive the click and reward. This helps to keep him in an active and learning state of mind. There are several useful training exercises you can teach your dog that will also help in your play or exercise sessions, such as walking on a loose leash and come back when called. More information on how

to teach these exercises can be found in the complete Pro Training Clicker™ and Click and Play™ guide on www.starmarkacademy.com.

The Drop command is used to make your dog release the item he has in his mouth and can be helpful in games of tug or fetch. This command can be taught with a clicker, some treats, and one of your dog's toys. Do not use his favorite toy at first because he may not be willing to give it up, even for food. Give your dog his toy, and then hold a treat slightly in front him. Since he will not be able to hold onto his toy and eat the treat at the same time, he will drop the toy. When he starts to drop it, click and reward him with the treat, and say "Drop." The command is initially given after he drops the toy so he will better understand what the command means. With practice, your dog will give you what he has when you say, "Drop" in exchange for a food reward.

Participating in dog sports, like agility, flyball, herding, lure coursing, etc., is another way to exercise your dog while having fun and stimulating your dog's mind. These sports require obedience skills with some advanced training, as well as body condition and stamina. Canine sports are growing in popularity and training clubs stretch across the country. For more information on how to get involved in canine sports contact one of your local clubs or a certified professional trainer.

Interactive Toys

Just because you are away from home doesn't mean that your dog has to wait by the door for your return. Providing interactive toys when your dog is in his crate or home alone can help prevent boredom behaviors like chewing, digging, barking, and others. The Everlasting Treat Ball™ is one interactive toy that you can fill with food or treats, and then cap off the ends with the hard Everlasting Treats™ to provide hours of challenging play. Make it a special toy that is reserved only for times that you will be away from home, or hide several around the house or yard for a game of hide and seek with a tasty reward at the end. You can even turn mealtime into a game by filling the Everlasting Treat Ball™ with your dog's regular meal. (Refer to Starmark's Behavior Solutions: Problem Prevention on www.starmarkacademy.com for more information.)

Fun and Fitness for Your Fido

Exercise and play are essential to your dog's overall mental and physical health. At Starmark Animal Behavior Center we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Each dog is unique, and so is his owner. That's why we use a variety of techniques, customizing your dog's training experience to suit his personality and your individual needs. Using our training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, your Fido can be fit as a fiddle.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Starmark Academy created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. Products mentioned in this guide are available at PETsMART and other pet supply retailers, as well as online at our web site: www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com. All products, guides and videos are tested and approved by the training directors of Starmark Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Starmark Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just like yours every day; we work with pet enthusiasts just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Starmark, the world leader in pet education.

For additional pet solutions and information about our products, please visit Starmark online at our web sites: www.dogtrainingandboarding.com; www.schoolfordogtrainers.com; and www.aboutdogtraining.com.

Starmark Academy Trainer Recommended Equipment

Starmark Everlasting Treat Ball™—Challenging interactive toy that provides hours of fun. The unique shape of the ball allows it to wobble and roll on its own. It is hollow, so you can also hide treats or a meal in it.

Everlasting Treats™—All-natural chew treats designed to fit on the ends of the Everlasting Treat Ball™. They are great by themselves as tasty snacks.

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Pro-Training Treats™—Bite-size treats that fit inside the Everlasting Treat Ball™. Used alone, these treats are perfect as tasty food rewards during training.

Starmark DuraFoam Disc™—New, easy-flying disc made of soft, puncture-resistant material that won't hurt your dog's mouth. It's the perfect toy for burning off energy during afternoon frolics.

Pro-Training Clicker™—A fast and easy way to teach your dog obedience commands. It's like saying, "Well done," on time, every time your dog does something you like.

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