



The Five Types of Canine Enrichment

Does my dog need enrichment? Everyone talks about it, but what is it exactly and why does it matter?

By definition, enrichment is "*the act of improving the quality of something, often by adding something to it*" (Oxford Dictionary). Basically, we enrich our pet's lives by providing them with the kind of physical and mental stimulation that allows them to engage in their innate behaviors.

There are 5 types of enrichment that satisfies different animal needs. All dogs can benefit by partaking in each type as often as possible. If their needs are not being met, dogs will find ways to fill those needs on their own...often to the detriment of household belongings, our patience, and our wallets.

1. Physical Enrichment

- a. Physical enrichment is not just going for a walk. Try asking your dog to put their front paws on a tree trunk, jump up on a park bench, climb on picnic tables, or go under a split-rail fence. Initiate a game of tug, wrestle with your dog, or play with a flirt pole. Get creative with it!

2. Sensory Enrichment

- a. A dog's most powerful sense is their sense of smell. Take your dog on a long line walk, aka sniffari, and let them follow their nose.. Rent a SniffSpot where they can take in all the scents. Bury treats in a sandbox and let them dig. Hide treats around your house for them to sniff out. Enroll in a Nosework Class together.

3. Nutritional Enrichment

- a. There are so many creative ways to introduce our dogs to new tastes without just throwing it in a bowl for them. At mealtimes, have your dog work for their food via puzzle toys, frozen food toys, rolled up towels, or cardboard boxes (bonus points if they get to destroy the box afterwards).

4. Occupational Enrichment

- a. All dogs benefit from having a job, but working dogs especially need mental stimulation. Teach your dog to help pick up laundry. Enroll in a group class.

Compete in agility. Teach your dog to find a particular scent and hide it around on your walk. The possibilities are endless!

5. Social Enrichment

- a. Social enrichment is spending quality time with your dog. Training, hiking, cuddling, and being silly together are all great ways to satisfy this need. Teaching your dog to be neutral towards other dogs or people is also a wonderful way for them to be social without making nervous dogs/people uncomfortable by rushing up to them. A social enrichment outing might be going to the park, sitting on a bench and watching the people pass by while your dog lays on their mat (with lots of yummy treats of course).

So many of our dogs' unwanted or destructive behaviors can be alleviated through meeting these needs. Regular enrichment activities in all 5 categories will help your dog to no longer feel that they need to satisfy those needs on their own. Engaging in enrichment with your dog will also help to strengthen your relationship and help you better understand your canine companion.