

# YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND: ENRICHMENT & PREVENTING PROBLEM BEHAVIORS

*"An enriched environment is interesting, allows animals to perform natural behaviors, permits them to be more active and increases the animals' control over their environment. Enrichment helps satisfy both the physical and psychological needs of animals and allows them to make choices."*

— The Saint Louis Zoo

The best way to address problem behaviors in dogs is to prevent them from happening in the first place! Enrichment provides dogs valuable mental and physical stimulation as well as crucial opportunities to bond and interact with their human. These activities help your dog feel satisfied, content, and less inclined to be anxious or destructive.

- **Decompression/Sniff Walks:** A decompression walk is one where your dog can be free to explore his natural environment as he pleases. Either on a long lead or off-leash (once you have good recall and training!), your dog can stop to sniff, roll, dig, run, chase, explore, and otherwise do all the dog things that he wants. This could be a walk in a park, on a beach, a trail system, or any space that is away from the busyness of traffic and people. Ideally, this walk is a long, meandering adventure of an hour or more, but really any time you can spend letting your dog be outside in nature is critical.
- **Play & Puppy Play Dates:** Don't you like hanging out with your friends? Having play dates with other dogs not only helps socialize your pup but provides crucial species-specific interactions they crave. When you can't play with other dogs, make sure to play with your dog yourself! Play tug with a rope, fetch, frisbee, hide and seek—keep their brains working!
- **Sniffing Games:** Dogs see the world through their noses! Sniffing is self-calming, informative, and highly mentally stimulating to your dog, and is a great way to start and finish a walk or decompress from a stressful event.
  - Play "find it" by scattering treats around your house, in the backyard, or along your walking path, and encouraging your dog to sniff them out.
  - Feed your dog meals from a Snufflemat, or make your own version with kibble hidden in cardboard boxes with tissue paper, cereal boxes, egg cartons, empty paper towel rolls, etc.
  - Take a nose work class at your local positive reinforcement training facility
  - Feed your dog from food puzzles—some examples of food puzzles and toys include the Kong Wobbler, Omega Paw Tricky Trainer Ball, and the Busy Buddy Twist N' Treat.
- **Chewing and Licking:** For dogs, chewing and licking is a valuable, self-soothing activity. You can stuff treats inside toys (like a Kong) or use lick mats (LickiMat, etc.)—spread their favorite foods on the mat, freeze, and then give them to your dog for a rewarding, soothing treat. This is especially helpful for anxious dogs.

