



Paw Prints

Resource sheet:

Keep your dog busy, not bored

Anxious or bored dogs can display behaviors like barking, digging, inappropriate chewing and escaping, which are unacceptable and stressful to you, and self-rewarding and damaging to the dog.

Dogs evolved from wolves, a social species that hunts to survive, requiring an enormous amount of physical and mental energy. When dogs first came to live alongside humans, they became domesticated, bred to do specific jobs and given work.

Most dogs today have only one job — to provide us with companionship. To do this, dogs must fit into increasingly busy lifestyles, with less time spent with their owners.

Play games with your dog, but take care how you play

Games with toys provide an outlet for both physical and mental energy. They also strengthen the bond between you and your dog.

Some games involve both you and your dog, including retrieve/fetch, hide and seek, chase (always let your dog chase you; NEVER chase your dog or you may accidentally teach him not to come when called) and others. Play these games often. Try to play with your dog for at least 20 minutes every day in addition to walks and other interactive time.

Avoid wrestling and other games that encourage your dog to "play rough" with you. These games have been known to cause dogs to accidentally injure people (especially children) and can teach dogs impolite behaviors like mouthing (play-biting) and jumping on people.

Be careful with tug-of-war too; this game can teach dogs to be pushy with people. If you enjoy playing tug with your dog, then first teach your dog a cue to drop things when asked, and never play tug with a dog who will not drop toys on request.

She will still love to play games if you follow these guidelines, and you shouldn't see any problems (i.e., growling over toys). If you do have problems with your dog playing tug or any other game, stop immediately and either seek professional help or do not play that game again (ever) with your dog.

Stimulate your dog's mind with toys and activities

Engaging your dog's mind is as important as physical exercise.

Lots of toys are designed for home-alone use by your dog.

1. **Kong™** toys are made to have peanut butter or other types of food rewards put inside them for your dog to get back out again. (Available at pet supply stores and many veterinarians.)
2. **Nylabones™** are super-tough plastic bones that dogs love to chew. They often last a year or longer. Be careful about imitation products — they can shatter and become a choking hazard.
3. **Buster cubes™** or **treat balls** filled with treats (available at pet supply stores or from your vet).
4. **Puzzle toys** are soft toys with smaller toys inside, like a plush beehive containing squeaky bees. Dogs learn to pull the smaller toys out to play with them.

Note: you'll have better success with toys that contain food if you start slowly, so the food comes out easily, and work your dog up to learning how to get food out of more tricky toys. Start by putting small hard treats or peanut butter inside a Kong™, then gradually stuff things more tightly inside, or freeze liquids inside for a real challenge.

Are you crafty? Try making some toys.

5. **Cardboard box fun** - Get the largest cardboard box you can find, and a stack of old newspapers. Roll 50 tight paper balls. Hide some smelly treats in 5 of the balls. Put all of the balls inside the cardboard box. Leave for your dog to find and unravel. You might have a paper mess to clean up, but at least it's constructive (for your dog's mind), clean, inexpensive destruction.
6. **Tupperware teasers** - Find or purchase old containers with lid seals. Fill some with toys, and some with really smelly food treats. Stack them high and let your dog knock them over and scratch at them, toss them in the air and whatever she needs to do to get the lids off and eat her yummy rewards.

When you're home...

7. **Hide and seek, hide treats to find.** Hide from your dog and call her (once) to find you. Give little noise hints if she needs help. Hide treats in a room while your dog is in another room, then release her to find them.
8. **Living room agility.** Set up an obstacle course and teach your dog to navigate it. Put blankets securely over chairs and encourage your dog to use them as a tunnel to get to you. Place a low obstacle in a doorway and encourage your dog to step over it to come to you for a treat. Increase the height gradually if your dog is healthy enough to learn to jump over things.
9. **Massage.** A 15-minute massage might calm your dog right down. Focus on the chest, backs of the ears, rib area, and upper legs. Slow, gentle touch in spots that feel comfortable to your dog can lower his heart rate and help him feel relaxed and happy.
10. **Lunch with the dog.** Can you slip home on your lunch break? A midday visit can help with toilet training and reduce daily stress. If you can't get home, consider hiring a dog walker once a week or more often to visit your dog in the middle of the day.

Outside when the weather is good ...

11. **Bobbing for balls.** Water play is great fun in summer. Place lightweight plastic balls, floating toys or ice blocks in a large container or a wading pool.
12. **Digging treasure pit.** Bury toys, treats and raw bones in the pit – leave some sticking out, and some buried deep. Put the pit in a cool, shaded place and keep it damp. Include some grass clippings in it as long as your dog doesn't have allergies. They will love rolling, digging and searching in it.

Safety note: Always supervise your dog the first time he plays with a new toy. Ensure that your dog is not able to choke on any of the parts, and make sure that s/he does not eat plastic or fabric.

Canine adventures...

13. **Bark & Brew sessions and other training classes.** Learn new tricks along with your dog. Contact the Lake Mills Veterinary Clinic for current offerings.
14. **Dog-friendly businesses.** Many local businesses invite well-mannered dogs inside, including the Tyrannena Brewing Company and most banks. Your dog will probably get a cookie, too!
15. **Drive-through windows.** Banks, restaurants and coffee shops with drive-thru windows are usually prepared to greet your dog with a tasty treat. This activity does have the mild hazard of teaching your dog to stare longingly at ATMs, drive-up mailboxes and other inanimate objects.
16. **Lake Mills Veterinary Clinic.** We welcome doggie visitors, even if you are not a client. Weigh your dog, get some treats from staff, check out toys, treats and other items in our shop – and help your dog understand that trips to the veterinarian aren't something to worry about.