

Enrichment in Kennels

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Why Do Dogs Need Enrichment?

Dogs in kennels can experience stress-causing factors. These factors may include noise, being around other stressed dogs, handling by caretakers, unfamiliar objects or people, malnutrition, hot or cold temperatures, and transportation. Some stressful factors that dogs in breeding kennels in particular face are pregnancy, whelping, nursing, pain or injury, illness, being alone, and/or not having enough space.

Dogs respond to stress in a number of ways. They may show a behavioral response such as changing their posture, or the fight or flight response where they may freeze, vocalize excessively, urinate/defecate, display repetitive spinning or pacing, or direct aggression towards other dogs or people. Dogs can also show a biological response, such as increased panting, increased metabolic rate, or immune system changes. Stress can weaken the immune system, which can lead to increased disease susceptibility and poor recovery from illness. Maternal stress during pregnancy affects fetal development and exposes puppies to high cortisol levels which can lead to high emotionality as adults.

The purpose of enrichment is to reduce stress in dogs and to reinforce socialization practices. Providing a dog with enrichment allows the animal to have a sense of control over their environment, which can help to reduce and avoid stress. There are 5 types of enrichment possible for dogs in kennels: Social, nutritional, occupational, sensory, and physical.

REMEMBER!

Enrichment is only valuable if it matters to the dog. An item or activity is not enriching if dogs do not use it, are afraid to use it, or are bored with it.

Each dog will have individual preferences as well, so it is important to change up the enrichments from time to time and tailor them to the individual dog's preferences.

Social Enrichment



Social enrichment is the practice of promoting contact with dogs and other species. This can be accomplished by:

- Having supervised play groups
- Using group housing for compatible dogs
 - Social living provides mental stimulation
- Taking dogs on walks, and creating positive interactions including play, praise, and petting.

A well-socialized dog will not become fearful, over-stimulated, or aggressive when exposed to new people, dogs, places, or objects.

Nutritional Enrichment



Nutritional enrichment encourages animals to use natural foraging/feeding behaviors to earn food. This can be accomplished by:

- Using puzzle feeders
- Hiding food to challenge the dog and encourage them to search for food
- Alternating feeds, treats, and chewable items

Increased foraging behavior may decrease unwanted behaviors such as excessive barking. It may also help increase physical activity, benefiting the animal's overall condition.

Occupational Enrichment



Occupational enrichment challenges dogs by giving them a “job” that encourages physical and mental stimulation.

This can be accomplished by:

- Playing sports, such as agility or fetch
- Practicing positive training regularly
 - Use treats to teach behaviors such as “sit” and walking on lead, or tricks like “shake”
- Providing food puzzles
 - These require the dog to “work” to get the food/treat out

Occupational enrichment helps keep dogs mentally stimulated, which combats boredom while also allowing them to release excess energy.

Sensory Enrichment

Sensory enrichment can be used to stimulate the different sense of dogs, such as sight, sound, or smell.

This can be accomplished by:

- Placing visually stimulating objects outside a dog’s run
- Allowing visual access to the kennel environment
- Including auditory enrichment, such as music
 - Select soothing music, keep the volume low, and the sound should not be on all the time
- Adding interesting scents such as herbs (e.g lavender, chamomile), spices (e.g vanilla, coconut, ginger) or commercially available animal scents (e.g. rabbit). Place scents inside a piece of PVC pipe with additional drilled holes so that it can be easily added/ removed from the dog’s pen

Effective sensory enrichment with herbs and spices can have a calming effect on animals, reducing barking and increasing resting.

Physical Enrichment



Physical enrichment includes altering the quality and complexity of the dog’s living space. This can be accomplished by:

- Providing safe toys, and having a rotation to maintain the enriching effect of the toys
- Adding physical features to a pen, run or kennel
 - These can include a bed, raised platform, ramp/steps or a door to allow access to the outside

Physical enrichments should provide outlets for positive expression of natural behaviors, and provide dogs with more control over their social and physical environment.

What can be reasonably accomplished in kennels in terms of enrichment?

Outdoor runs can provide exercise, mental stimulation, and social opportunities. However, it is important to provide shade, water, and other resources necessary to keep dogs comfortable, safe, and engaged while using their runs. Outdoor yards or indoor spaces that can be used for supervised group play may also be helpful because they allow dogs to get the benefits of exercise and play while allowing their caretakers to observe the dogs for undesirable behaviors that need interventions, such as bullying or shyness. This allows caretakers to begin working with those specific dogs earlier to address those problems. Add physical enrichment to these areas for added benefits (toys, climbing structures, digging pits, or water pools). This enrichment activity also promotes socialization to other dogs, objects, people, and surfaces!

When implementing enrichment practices, it is important to remember to allocate resources wisely and to disperse them evenly throughout the kennel. Once the resources are in place, monitor their use to ensure they are being used often, safely, and that they are accessible to all dogs who desire to do so without requiring unnecessary competition.