

Boredom in dogs it can lead to all sorts of unwanted, problematic and antisocial behaviours. If a dog does not have enough mental and physical stimulation then the dog may find other outlets for these frustrations including:

- Destructive behaviour
- Attention seeking
- Barking
- Self-mutilation
- Pacing
- Tail chasing

Some breed types, especially working-type dogs require more mental stimulation than others but all dogs can become bored or withdrawn if continually left for long periods.

How can we prevent a dog getting bored?

Dogs are natural scavengers and would quite happily keep busy all day looking around for food. Using interactive toys that encourage the dog to problem-solve to find food helps keep them happy by using their brains.

To keep a dog out of trouble in the home, you need to devise fun and interesting things to do using part of, or his entire, daily food ration. However, remember that a dog who has to work too hard for his food when he is starving hungry may become frustrated and possibly aggressive. Make sure he has ample opportunity to eat with ease.

Things to try in the home and garden (always ensure toys are appropriate and safe!):

- Buy an interactive toy such as a Kong, Havaball or Buster cube. These are all toys that can be filled with food and treats so that your dog has to work to access the food.
- Scatter dry food and treats around your house and garden.
- Fill a cardboard box with exciting treats and food. Then place layers of scrunched up newspaper and blankets. He'll have a lot of fun digging and pulling out the stuffing to get to the treats.

Fed up with holes in your lawn? Why not build your dog his own sand-pit or earth-pit? Either sink it into the ground or have one that is raised up – it just needs to be big enough for your dog to get in and have a really good dig to find buried toys and treats. Chew toys will help him avoid chewing something that he shouldn't. Try him with synthetic bones, dental chews that massage the gums, pigs' ears, large raw beef bones or large rawhide chews - rotate what you give him every day, so that he doesn't get bored. Keep anything that you don't want him to chew out of reach!



Other boredom beating ideas:

- Try clicker training, as it encourages your dog to think about what he is doing and enables you to teach him all sorts of tricks. Try a book about this, or visit a local training class - once you and your dog get the idea, the sky's the limit!
- Outdoor walks in different areas are great to wear dogs out mentally and physically. Letting your dog have a really good run off lead in a safe place is essential – nothing is better for him. Giving him the opportunity to sniff around at will and meet other dogs helps him use his doggy communication skills and his sense of smell – using his brain to help keep him happy and contented.
- Take a favourite toy out with you that you keep only for walks. Active playing will wear him out a lot more quickly than just walking alone – after you've let him have a good sniff and greeted doggy chums of course! Playing with you will also help to keep him under control if he is prone to running off. If you and his toy are the most interesting thing on his walk, he won't want to leave you.
- Play hide and seek with your dog, in a safe wooded area or if there are bushes around. Wait until your dog is not looking at you and then hide. Call your dog and wait for him to find you. Give him lots of praise and a tasty treat when he does, so that it becomes an exciting and fun game. If you are walking your dog with someone else, take turns holding your dog whilst the other hides.
- Try some recall training while you're on a walk; call him to you for a really tasty treat and then let him go and play. Do this several times during your walk. As well as encouraging him to keep his attention on you and teaching him that coming on command does not have to mean the end of his walk, you'll be training a perfect recall for any sticky situation.

Teach him to follow a scent trail:

1. Get a clean old sock or pair of tights and fill the toe with some particularly smelly food that your dog loves.
2. Shut your dog away so he cannot see you, drag the sock or tights along the floor to a hiding place, such as behind a cushion on the sofa – but don't make the trail too long until he gets the hang of it.
3. Take a few pieces of the food and place at the beginning of the trail and partway along, to help him on his first few tries. Bring him back into the room to the start of the trail.
4. Encourage him to follow it and he should find the hidden sock. When he finds it, praise him and give him the treats hidden inside.

As he gets better at following the trail, stop putting treats along the way and make the trail longer and more complicated. For more of a challenge, try it in the garden.

Organised club activities:

Why not join a canine activity club? Learning fun new skills and meet and socialise with other dogs and their owners. You could try:

- Agility
- Flyball
- Obedience
- Working Trials and Tracking
- Field Trials
- Heelwork to Music

If you would like more information about local clubs, please contact either:

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers – 01285 810811 (www.apdt.co.uk)

The Kennel Club – 0870 6066750 (www.the-kennel-club.org.uk)

If you need more advice on this beating boredom please contact your local Dogs Trust rehoming centre for further information or ask your vet to refer you to a behaviour specialist.