



CLIMBING THE WALLS?

After a few weeks of quarantine we may all be starting to feel a little stir-crazy. You may be finding that one walk a day isn't cutting it for your dog, or he is missing his social time with his friends in the park or at his daycare. Boredom can manifest as barking, other attention-seeking behaviour, or destructive behaviour as the dog makes his own entertainment.

When physical exercise is limited, mental stimulation can really help to use up a dog's "activity budget" and avoid boredom and the associated problem behaviours.



Substituting bowls with puzzle feeders are a quick and easy way to offer some interest. Activity feeders such as Kongs, treat balls, Wobblers, maze dishes and puzzle feeders are designed for this purpose.

If you don't have these at home, or you need to offer your dog new challenges, you can get creative with plastic bottles, yoghurt pots, plastic flowerpots and cardboard boxes. Hide the food inside or under the object, or make a few holes in a bottle or box and put the lid back on to give your dog a bit of a challenge.

Scatter-feeding (sprinkling dry food onto floors indoors or out) introduces more interest and encourages your dog to use his nose to search for his food. Test his sniffing skills by hiding a treat under one flowerpot, and asking him to pick that flowerpot out of a row.

As puppies (and many older dogs) love to chew, you can direct this behaviour to appropriate outlets and create challenges for them whereby they have to find food or a toy that is inside a cardboard box or a newspaper ball (take care they don't consume cardboard or paper). As they become more experienced you can make this more challenging by making pass-the-parcel with layers of paper, or boxes inside boxes. Diggers may enjoy being given a corner of the garden or a sandpit – bury a ball or toy and encourage them to investigate. Increase the challenge as they get more confident.



For more ideas along these lines, try the "Canine Enrichment" group on Facebook. It's useful at the best of times but invaluable now! www.facebook.com/groups/137561280156280/



Reward-based training is great for mental stimulation, as well as strengthening your bond with your dog – if you need the distraction too, perhaps challenge yourself and your dog to learn a new trick every day! This could include teaching him positions, agility or parkour skills, or actions involving items he can manipulate.

Try teaching your dog a vocabulary by naming his toys as he plays with them, so that he will bring you the one you ask for.

If you need any help with the basics of reward-based training, all my puppy class training handouts are currently available from my website.

Although in-person training sessions and home visits are not currently possible, I'm offering live online consultations via various platforms to help with behavioural issues in dogs and cats, and shorter training sessions are also available. To find out more please email lucy@petbehaviourhelp.co.uk or visit my [website](http://www.petbehaviourhelp.co.uk).

Lucy Bingley CCAB is a local Certificated Clinical Animal Behaviourist working on veterinary referral to help dogs and cats with behavioural disorders.