

Is your dog bored? Need help coming up with creative ways to keep him entertained? Well, here it is! Bored dogs get into trouble and develop unwanted habits. By giving them outlets for their energy and by actively playing with your dog, he will be better behaved. I have broken these down into 3 sections: While you are away or busy, active indoor play with your dog and outdoor activities and sports.

While you are away:

When you leave your dog home alone (or with other pets), they get bored. When dogs are bored, they invent their own "games" like "Let's see how much stuffing is in the couch" or "Let's see how big of a hole I can chew in the carpet/wall/door/etc.")

By giving your dog acceptable outlets for his energy, your relationship won't be strained and you won't have to worry about the condition of your home upon your return (crating or limiting your dog's access to certain areas while you are away can help too!) The younger the dog, the more likely that he will need diversions. Crating young dogs when you can't be there to watch them is recommended so that they never learn how much fun it is to disembowel the couch or dig in the plants. Crating also keeps the dog safe from hazards like choking on stuff they shouldn't chew, death from chewing on electrical wires, poisoning and falls. As long as the dog is getting good things when he enters the crate, he should learn to love his own "den."



Kongs- These wonderful devices are a God send. Kong has come out with several different toys that are perfect for bored dogs and will hold up to the most aggressive chewer (so even though they cost a bit, they will last for a LONG time.) Most of the Kong toys are meant to be filled. There are even websites devoted to "kong recipes!" Try making a mush of their dog food and stuffing it in the kong, then freeze it. Or smear the inside of the Kong with peanut butter or squeeze cheese (they are dishwasher safe). Depending on the filling, your dog can be kept busy for long enough for you to get out the door or for all day. Check out the Kong website for more info: <http://www.kongcompany.com/>

Chew toys- Carefully chosen toys meant for chewing and ingestion can help keep dogs busy and help alleviate anxiety he may be feeling. Some are even designed to help clean the dog's teeth as they chew. The "bones" (from companies like Nylabone) that are meant to be eaten are safe for most dogs. If you dog bites off big chunks of these or any other toy, they are not safe without supervision (so you can remove the chunks or toys.) Some dogs chew so

powerfully, they can fracture their teeth on hard chew toys. The hard rubber toys are best for these dogs. Rawhide is not recommended because it gets sticky and gummy when wet from chewing and dogs have choked on pieces they ingest that are a bit too large to swallow.

Knotted rope toys- These can provide great fun for your dog both when you are gone (shaking, pouncing, tossing, 'killing') and when you are home (tug-o-war.) When you first provide a rope to your dog, be sure to watch what they do with it. If your dog uses his back teeth to cut the strings and then swallows them, then ropes should only be used in your presence so you can stop that behavior. As long as your dog is not eating the rope, then unsupervised play should be OK.

Fleece toys- Some dogs don't have an interest in shredding toys, but would rather 'cuddle' with a soft toy while you are away. Many retrievers and dogs with a strong 'mothering' instinct find comfort in carrying a soft toy around. Often times if the soft toy has a squeaker inside, dogs feel compelled to disembowel the toy to get the squeaker out. Good news is that they often still enjoy the unstuffed toy :-)

A wading pool- If your dog stays outside while you are away, particularly if it's hot, a wading pool may be the best thing. He can splash in the water, get a drink, or even lay in the water to cool down. If you have a pool, your dog can swim in that. Just be sure to rinse the dog completely when he's done with his swim to remove any pool chemicals.

Buster cubes- There are several toys on the market that are meant to be filled with small dry treats or dog food. When the dog shoves the toy around, it lets out a piece of food at random. Dogs are able to give themselves a reward for playing with these toys! Many will continue to play even when the toy is empty. If you have multiple dogs, use these with caution as there may be fights over food.

Big ball- There are both hard and soft balls available for dogs. Many of the herding dogs enjoy playing 'soccer' by pushing a large ball around. Any ball too large for the dog's mouth will work for this.

A suspended ball- My Rottweiler has to be dragged away from a ball (or tire) on a rope -He loves it! Many dogs love playing their own version of tether ball. For safety, a ball or other chewable object too big to get in the dog's mouth should be hung from a horizontal pole or really heavy branch, instead of a vertical pole (as in a regular tether ball.)

A sandbox- Do you have a terrier or other dog that loves to dig? Is your dog tearing up your garden? Why not give them their own place to dig? You can hide treats and toys to encourage the dog to dig in his own place.

When you want to play indoors-

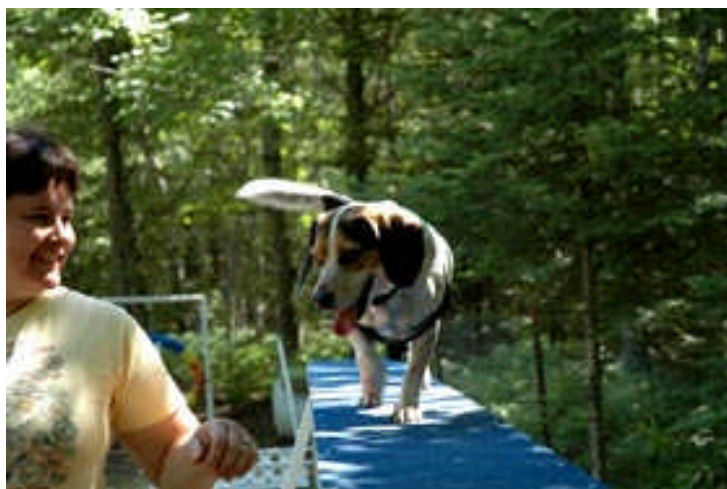
Teach your dog a trick- Using positive training methods, your dog will enjoy a training session. Working his mind can be more tiring than physical activity! "Free shaping" can be the most tiring for the dog but still lots of fun as long as you take it in small steps and don't fade the rewards too fast. If your dog responds correctly to many different cues, you can work on increasing the speed of the dog's response. You could also mix it up and see if your dog will respond if you are out of sight in the next room or have your back to him or if you are lying on the floor. Always keep training fun!



Play hide and seek- Start out easy, hiding in plain sight and calling your dog from another room. Reward him when he gets to you. Gradually make it harder as he learns the game and finds out that finding you brings him good things. If you have an extra family member to play with, you can take turns hiding/calling and holding the dog.

Nose work- There are many games you can teach your dog that involve his nose. Even dogs that are not usually known for using their nose can enjoy these games. You can hide the dog's meals, treats, toys, etc. If you give each of the dog's toys a name, you can tell him which toy to find. You can also teach him to find certain scents and hide items with those scents as well.

Obstacles- Use your imagination and things you have around the house to teach your dog to go over, around, under and through. Appropriately sized boxes for 'through'. A broom stick on blocks for a jump. Milk jugs evenly spaced for 'around' or 'weave'. Have fun with it!



Bear enjoys the Agility "Dog Walk"

Fetch- a good ol' stand-by. Toss a ball from your seat on the couch or go out in the fenced yard for a more robust game. Balls, Frizbees, Sticks, other toys can all be used for fetch. You can also teach you dog to retrieve items on cue. Things like a tissue, the phone, your keys, a dropped pen can all be useful behaviors and will give your dog a job.

Tug-o-war- This can be a great game as long as it is played with the proper rules. Dogs have great control over where their teeth are and how hard they use them (just as we do with our hands.) If your dog's teeth touch your skin, the game ends (at least long enough to make a point.) Also, the toy is YOURS not the dog's. You decide when the game starts and when it ends. When played with these rules, the game will not make your dog mean, but instead will give your dog a safe outlet for any pent up frustration. The dog should release their hold on the toy as soon as you tell them to do so. You can teach this by giving the verbal cue of "out" or "release" or "drop" (pick only one) and then offering the dog a treat or alternate toy. When the dog lets go of the tug toy, he gets the treat/alternate toy and then the tug game resumes.

Recall/Stay game- In this game, you can work on your dog's stay cue and the recall cue (the dog has to know these cues prior to the game.) Put your dog on a stay and walk away to whatever distance they are ready for and then call them as you run away. When they catch you, they get a reward (toy, treat, etc.) If the dog breaks the stay, it's a no reward and they have to get back into position in the stay to start over. This will help improve the dog's response to both stay and come as long as the game is fun.



Clean up your toys- If you have taught your dog to retrieve, you can teach him to clean up his toys! Having the dog return items to your hand to get a reward is easily converted to dropping the item in a basket (placed under your hands to start, then moved farther and farther away.) The dog gets rewarded anytime the item gets into the basket at first, gradually he'll work toward picking up all of his toys before getting a reward.

Lazer lights- Many dogs are crazy about chasing a lazer light dot. Just be sure you don't shine it directly in the dog's eyes or cause them to stop or turn too quickly or run down stairs too quickly.

Work on socialization: Visit pet stores, training centers or any other location that allows dogs and let your dog visit with any willing member of his fan club.

Dig it!- Hide treats or toys under a blanket or towel and let your dog figure out how to get them.

Treadmill- Do you have a treadmill? Teach your dog to use it! Never attach the dog to the machine or leave them unsupervised.

Outdoor activities:

Biking- By teaching your dog how to safely accompany you on your bike rides, you can both get exercise and enjoy the outdoors. Using a specially designed attachment system like a [Springer](#) will help make it safer for both of you. Be sure to check your dog's feet often for wear, especially if they are moving on a hard surface and avoid more than a few minutes of hard exercise if it's above 75 degrees or high humidity.



Swimming/dock diving- Many dogs love to swim. Your dog might also enjoy fetching things from the water or diving off of a dock.

Carting/Sledding/Skijoring/bikejoring- Does your dog like to pull? Put him to work! Teach him to pull a cart, sled, bike or you on skis or roller blades. Be sure you are adept with the item before attaching the dog!



Kayaking/Canoeing- A leisurely float down a river can be a great way to spend an afternoon with your dog. Several of the troop members and their dogs have enjoyed this activity and we try to take at least two river trips a year. Start by taking a short trip without your dog if you have never paddled a kayak or canoe. Once you get the hang of it, bring your companion along for the ride. It is helpful if the dog knows and responds to the sit and stay cue. If your dog is not an accomplished swimmer, a doggie life jacket might help him get accustomed to the water. A rug or pad in the bottom of the boat can make the dog more comfortable.



Bear loves to kayak!

Dog sports: (Many can be done just for fun!)



Obedience Trials- Dogs are judged on their precision and response to cues.

Tracking- Dogs using their nose looking for various items over various terrain

Search and Rescue- Find lost or missing persons or just a friend hiding for you

Agility- A timed event in which the dog is guided (off-leash and without handler contact) around a course of obstacles. Dogs have to run, jump, climb and go through obstacles.

Herding- Rounding up livestock or ducks in a controlled manner

Flyball- A fast paced team sport in which dogs run a relay over hurdles to get to the 'flyball box' to retrieve a tennis ball and bring it back over the hurdles.

Lure Coursing- A sight hound sport that encourages the dog to chase a fast moving object (usually a plastic bag tied to a string loop) around a course. In competition, only sighthounds can compete, but some clubs allow other breeds on fun runs and any dog can try it at Dog Scout camp! The red object in the photo below is the guide for the string so it can be laid out in a big loop. The string and the object tied to it are driven by a variable speed drive wheel.



Bear is obsessed with lure coursing!

Steeplechase: This is the terrier's version of lure coursing, but any breed can try it at Dog Scout camp! It involves a straight, fenced course and low jumps. The same lure is used as in lure coursing. Several dogs run at once and at the end, find a small opening between hay bales which is only large enough for one dog at a time to pass through. First dog through wins! The dogs wear muzzles to prevent them from using aggression to win or after they get through the opening and can't find the lure.



Bear the beagle loves steeplechase too! And he's FAST!

Weight pull- A contest of strength to see which dog in a particular weight class can pull the most weight a specific distance.

Schutzhund- A German police sport that combines obedience, tracking and protection work. Other variations of this exist such as Ring Sport, Street Ring, KNVP, etc. This tests the dog's control and ability to an extreme standard.

Therapy Dog- Dog/handler teams visit persons in nursing homes and hospitals to help brighten their day or assist them with physical therapy like throwing a toy or even just petting the dog.

Frizbee- Does your dog love to catch a frizbee? Perhaps he or she can compete for distance or free style! Even if you choose not to compete, catching a frizbee is something many dogs enjoy.



Coyote during competition