



AWCLO



## Enrichment

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Enrichment is a term referred to more and more these days in relation to the appropriate care of our dogs. It is extremely important that as our puppies grow, they need exposure to day to day noises and also to be occupied with various activities that also serve to minimise destruction of lawns, gardens, furniture and prevent barking from boredom.

Enrichment encompasses:

- Environmental
- Social
- Cognitive
- Age/Physical Status appropriate

## Environment

Always ensure typical household noises continue around any litters that you are raising, including noises from television, radio, vacuum cleaner, hair dryer, washing machine, dishwasher, lawn mower, etc. These all help a puppy to become adjusted to noise, but environmental enrichment also extends to the dog's other senses of touch, sight, smell and taste. Stimulation of these senses have proved very worthwhile in preventing boredom.

Provide your dog with various surfaces to walk on, toys made from a range of different sizes, shapes and textures and kong toys with different treats used. When puppies find their way to a new companion home, they will be presented with very different surroundings and experiences. Having already exposed puppies to environmental enrichment in the initial 'Imprint Period' (7 to 16 weeks) is especially important with the readjustment in a new home.

Many breeders also build a 'Puppy Play Station' with which their young puppies can interact. These can be as big or small as you think suitable and are only limited by your imagination as to what tactile objects you hang from the frame. The image on the right shows a play station with a number of different objects including chewable toys, but you can add small lightweight metal buckets and metal cupcake tins, mixed in with various toys: the clanging of the metal objects helps your puppies adjust to different noises. The pvc piping, three way connectors, plastic chains, etc are all readily available through your local hardware store or the internet.

## Social

When suitably vaccinated, you can enrol your puppy in 'Puppy Pre-School' conducted at many Vet Clinics. These classes are conducted by qualified trainers that are experienced in helping achieve acceptable puppy behaviour and interaction. As your puppy grows, a simple walk to the park and back will provide short physical activity for both you and your dog, but meetings with other dogs at dog parks is also an excellent opportunity for your dog to interact. Caution should be exercised at dog parks, to establish that other dogs in the area are safely controlled by their owners, before you step into the off-leash area.



## Cognitive

To give your dog a chance to use its attributes, consider some basic obedience, trick training or scent work classes for example. There are opportunities for your dogs to test and expand their skills through training classes offered by Obedience Clubs and training organisations. There are many disciplines that your dog could undertake should they show the aptitude. Some others are:

- Herding
- Agility
- Earthdog
- Endurance
- Flyball
- Tracking
- Lure Coursing
- Dances with dogs



*Image: Caroline Camelleri, Darwin Photography Professionals*

These activities enable your dog to use its skills, whether instinctive or learned, and to also gain the social stimulation from interacting with other dogs in a controlled environment.

## Age/Physical Status

With advancing years, or if your dog has been left with permanent damage from an injury, it is crucial to adjust enrichment activities to suit your dog.

Dogs developing arthritis will not benefit from chasing after a Frisbee or a ball at the park if it is going to cause them any degree of pain. They may need a more tactile surface to walk on to prevent slipping. If failing eyesight is a concern, maintain the dog's environment to ensure your dog can safely move around in an area that is familiar, thus preventing injury from bumping into unexpected objects.

Each dog is unique, therefore it is important to cater activities that your dog enjoys and is interested in. Do not force your dog to exercise beyond its comfort level. If your dog is not enthusiastic to engage in an activity, try looking for some other stimulation that your dog is keen to participate in. Snuffle mats can provide interest to dogs whose mobility is waning, for one reason or another. Monitor your dog's weight to avoid undue stress on arthritic joints, as excessive weight will limit the activities your dog can comfortably perform.



Enrichment is an essential welfare matter for dogs and their owners and can have far-reaching benefits for both.

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