



## What Every Dog Needs

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Behavior problems can sometimes develop in dogs when their intrinsic and instinctive needs are not properly satisfied. Most people do a good job of fulfilling their dog's basic needs by providing sincere affection, adequate food, safe shelter, and regular veterinary care. But dogs have other needs that are just as critical to their well-being. If these aren't adequately met, a dog may develop psychological problems. Essential to preventing behavior problems and to help ensure a dog's behavioral wellness are:

- **Appropriate Daily Exercise and Physical Activity**
- **Positive Social Interactions**
- **Brain Games: Training and Mental Stimulation**
- **Benevolent Leadership and Constructive Guidance**

### Appropriate Daily Exercise and Physical Activity

*"A tired dog is a well-behaved dog."* Perhaps you have heard this phrase before. Well, it is definitely true! Vigorous exercise can go a long way to prevent canine mischief.

It makes good sense, too, if you really think about it. Many of the most popular breeds of dogs in this country were originally bred to be hard-working, contributing members of the family, not just pets: Labrador Retrievers, German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers, Border Collies, Springer Spaniels, Australian Shepherds, Rottweilers, Hounds, Cocker Spaniels, Terriers of every name and type, Standard Poodles, Beagles—the list goes on and on. After a long day of herding sheep, guarding livestock or property, digging up vermin, or tracking and hunting, these intelligent and athletic working dogs return home exhausted and content.

But when today's pet dog becomes a couch-potato—or worse, is banished to a backyard kennel—his primal need for heavy, tongue-dragging daily exercise and meaningful activity goes unsatisfied, and behavior problems may be the result. We've seen many cases in which certain behavior problems (particularly those arising from inactivity or boredom) have simply vanished when the owner has provided sufficient and appropriate physical activity and exercise every day.

### Positive Social Interactions

Dogs are social beings. They were never meant to live in isolation. Their canine "cousins" in the wild live in tightly-knit social groups and engage in highly organized group activities like tracking and hunting their food, guarding and protecting the pack, and play.

The demands of our busy modern lifestyle and extended workdays force many of our pet dogs to spend long hours alone and isolated. This takes a toll on their mental and emotional well-being. It's vital that families find ways to provide their dogs with fun and interesting opportunities for quality social interactions with people of all kinds—new people as well as family members—and with other dogs. This on-going socialization of your dog with people and other animals will help prevent many types of fear and aggression from developing.

## Brain Games: Training and Mental Stimulation

Dogs have keen, intelligent minds. Just like people, they need to think and learn new things throughout their lives to stay mentally healthy. Lack of mental stimulation often leads to boredom; and boredom is the number one cause of many problem behaviors such as destructive chewing, excessive barking, and yard destruction.

Dogs need interesting things to do! Start with the basics—*train* your dog to sit and stay, settle down, come when called, greet people and other dogs appropriately, and walk nicely on a leash, so you will want to take him places and he will be welcome everywhere.

Get your dog hooked on hollow chew toys stuffed with his daily food ration so he has to work hard to pull the food out in order to eat. This activity will keep your dog content and occupied while you and your family are away at work or school. It will also tire him out so he's more likely to snooze during his time alone.

Have fun with your dog and play interactive games of fetch and tug to build your relationship and to burn off pent-up energy. Teach your dog amusing tricks. Set up jumps, ramps and tunnels in the backyard to challenge your dog. You can even use play and games as powerful reinforcements (“real life rewards”) during training. You are only limited by your imagination when thinking up fun and mentally stimulating things for your dog to do.

## Benevolent Leadership and Constructive Guidance

All social groups need leadership to avoid dissolving into chaos. A true leader is not a dictator, but an understanding, fair and benevolent guide. Traditional, old-school thinking about the need to “dominate” dogs or be the “alpha of the pack” is based on faulty conclusions drawn from outdated and inaccurate studies of wolf behavior—studies that have been refuted by newer research.

Attempts to physically force, dominate, or intimidate a dog will backfire and result in a failed relationship. Using force and dominance is also potentially very dangerous to humans, especially when a large and uncooperative dog is involved. Such methods inevitably destroy trust and any possibility of mutual respect or a loving bond, and are totally unnecessary. Dogs respond more quickly, willingly, and happily to benevolent leadership rather than physical dominance. Just like we do!

The qualities needed to provide effective, benevolent leadership for a dog are the same we desire to see in any good and fair leader of humans. Benevolent leaders build trust by dwelling on the positive, not the negative. They ensure that the individual performing a task is given the knowledge, understanding, structure and resources necessary to carry out that task successfully. Effective leaders don't dwell on mistakes; instead, they redirect energy to produce a positive outcome. They encourage good performance by expressing trust and respect all along the way. And great leaders reward a job well done with something meaningful and desirable.

Your dog needs an understanding, fair, and consistent teacher and guide, not a dictator. Once you start to provide this type of benevolent leadership for your dog, you will be well on your way to a successful and harmonious relationship.