

In Partnership With Dogs Mental Exercises©

Important Note: You should always monitor your dog while they play these games and make sure they don't consume anything they shouldn't.

Scroll Down to View the Exercise of Your Choice:

Kibble Scramble

Fun for humans too! Pour a glass of wine, go out on the deck and

- Take your dog's meal portion of kibble and toss it all over your backyard (or other safe, grassy area) and cue them to go "get dinner". It's as easy as that! If they want dinner, they're going to have to go and look for it.
- Most dogs will spend at least an hour looking for their dinner – depending on the length of your grass – and will then go back several times in the day looking for some that they may have missed.
- If you feed raw food instead, you can either cook the raw and throw it out or cut down your dog's meal portion amount and use an equivalent amount of tiny treats to toss out instead as an activity between mealtimes.
- The longer your grass is or the more natural the area that you use, the longer it will take to find the kibble or treats.

* If you feed your dog raw food, you can cut back his meal size and use an equivalent amount of good quality of kibble for this exercise or substitute tiny, tasty and smelly treats!

Treat Toss

Side Benefit – great repetitive practice for your Recall!

- Either inside or outside grab a chair and your dog's meal portion of kibble (or a bag of tiny, yummy treats) and call your dog over to you.
- Toss one piece out, wait for your dog to find it and come back to you.
- As soon as your dog comes back to you, mark and praise (Yes! Good boy!) and toss another piece out for them to run out and find.
- The criteria for the game to continue – treats to get tossed out – is to return to you.
- If your dog doesn't return to you at first, simply call them to you the first few times, then stop calling them once they get the hang of the game.
- Vary the distance and direction you toss the treats to keep the game interesting.

Find It

A great scenting game to teach your dog to start using his nose.

- With your dog out of the area or in a Wait, hide 5 small treats several feet apart – but remember where you put them.
- With your dog on leash, approach the first treat but don't get close enough for him to get it. Wait for his focus on you (just wait, don't cue it), then point directly at the first treat and cue "Find It".
- When he finds and eats the treat, mark and praise and move close to the second treat.
- Approach the second treat, not too close, and wait for his focus on you. This time point close to but not directly at the treat and cue "Find It". Once he finds and eats the treat, mark and praise.
- Do the next 3 treats in a similar manner, but make your direction (pointing) a little harder each time until you are pointing just in the general vicinity of the last treat.
- At any point when your dog looks up at you, he is asking for help and you can re-direct his nose by pointing him in the right direction of the treat.
- If you play this game often, your dog will get to understand the cue and get better at finding things using his nose without much help from you except the beginning cue.
- This is a game to be played on leash – something you are offering your dog that is under your direction and control and cannot be played without you.

Buried Treasure

With this exercise you are teaching your dog that it is okay to dig – so ensure you create a very specific spot for this activity and prevent digging anywhere else in your yard. Remember - don't Punish – Prevent!

- In your yard or on your balcony /deck, create a specific area for your dog filled with sand or dirt – a low, large plant pot or sand box works well.
- Cover a handful of very smelly treats in an old, holey sock or clean, holey dishrag and bury the package a few inches deep in your digging spot.
- Cue your dog to "Get It" and help them by scratching a little bit of dirt or sand away from the package. Once they begin digging, you can encourage them with praise.
- When they have dug up the package, mark and praise them and help them unwrap their gift (if necessary!).
- When they get really good at this game, you can add to the challenge by using less smelly treats, burying the treats in a clean yogurt container with holes punched in it (so they also have to figure out how to open that), and burying the object deeper.
- If you feed raw bones, you can bury their bone for them to find.

Towel Diving

Make sure you use an old towel for this!

- Using one large towel or several smaller ones (or several large ones for more challenge) – lay one towel flat out on the ground.
- Sprinkle some tiny treats over a corner or over the whole towel if using more than one.
- Fold the rest of the towel over the treats, or lay another towel on top and sprinkle more treats on another exposed portion of towel.
- Continue sprinkling treats and folding over portions or laying one towel on top of another until all your treats and towels are used.
- Call your dog over and cue them to “Find It” – you may have to lift up a corner to show them the first treat. Continue cueing them to “Find It” (if necessary) until all the treats are gone.

Variation: You can vary this game by tying the treats into knots instead of hiding in layers of the towel. Carpet remnants or samples works well for this game, too.

Mental Muffins

If you have a boring dinner party, here’s one way to lighten things up!

- Use a metal muffin baking pan for this game – either 6, 8 or 12 muffins slots is fine.
- Find a variety of balls to match the number of spots in your muffin pan – as many different sizes, weights and types of materials as you can. Balls that are too large and/or heavy for your dog to pick up work really well. You can even scrunch up a piece of paper to make a paper ball, too.
- Put one very smelly and yummy treat in the bottom of each muffin slot and then cover each treat with a ball. Call your dog over and cue him to “Find It”.
- Just stand back and watch the fun! Each dog is different in the various techniques they employ to get the treat under the ball.

Wait For It

Good practice for your obedience!

- You can play this one inside or outside.
- Using a stationary obedience cue like Wait (or Sit, or Down, or Go To Your Bed, or) cue your dog and go and hide several small treats on the ground either around furniture legs or trees and rocks. Keep track of how many you hide and where you put them. Don’t put treats anywhere that might encourage your dog to do anything destructive to find (like under couch cushions or corners of the carpet).

Wait For It, continued.

- When you're finished, go back to your dog and cue him to "Find It" and watch while he races off to find and eat each treat. Keep track of what he finds - while he's first learning, you may have to help him by pointing out a few of the treats.
- Once he gets really good at this game, you can ask him to wait in different rooms of the house, or out of site outside while you hide the treats.

Walk and Toss

A good way to liven up your daily walk.

- You can play this game on leash or off leash.
- Get your dog's attention, toss a treat off to the side (not further than the end of the leash length) and cue him to "Find It".
- Wait for him to find the treat and return to you before continuing on your walk. Walk several feet then toss out another treat and cue him to "Find It".
- If you vary how often you play during the walk and how many feet you walk between each toss and find, you should start to see your dog checking in with you frequently and paying more attention to you in general over the course of your walk.

Bobbing for Hot Dogs

Surely, this is self-explanatory - but make sure you play it outside!

- Use a container for this that is appropriate to the size of your dog - smaller for small dogs, bigger for big dogs, etc. If you have a dog with a pushed in nose, be sure to use a very shallow pan or consider a different game from the list above.
- Fill a shallow pan, casserole dish, bucket or children's wading pool with a couple inches of water - depending on the proficiency of your dog. Start very shallow at first.
- Float thinly sliced pieces of hot dog or pieces of dog pepperoni on the surface and cue your dog to "Get It". Make sure to monitor their progress so they don't have trouble or breathe in water. Most dogs will resort to using their feet or their heads as scoops to splash bits of hot dog out of the water and into the grass!

Bait and Switch

A doggy slight of hand!

- Use 3 plastic cups or empty yogurt containers for this game.
- With your dog watching, hide a very smelly treat under one cup then switch all the cups around keeping track of which one holds the smelly treat.
- Cue your dog to "Find It" and see if he can figure out which cup holds the treat.