



## *Step One: Decompression*

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#### Brain Games

##### What are brain games?

Brain games are activities that will stimulate your dog's mind and satisfy their innate need to sniff, forage, seek, herd and find. Depending on your dog's breed, they may be more interested in certain games than others. For example, a hunting dog may really enjoy a game of hide and go seek, or a hound may really enjoy a treasure hunt game.

Engaging your dog's mind naturally calms and relaxes them and can be just as effective as running three miles! If you have a dog that never seems to tire even after being outside running or playing for hours, you have a dog who will really benefit from brain games!

In addition, brain games offer a great way to bond with your dog and have fun in a new, creative way that doesn't take up a lot of time. These games are also often independently played by your dog so they can be calm and quiet while you get some work done at home or when you have company over.

##### Do-It-Yourself Games:

#### **1. Hide and Go Seek (practices "sit" and "stay" as well as recall)**

- a. One person will hide and one person will gently hold the dog or have the dog on leash
- b. Before the person hides the person holding the dog or leash will say "sit" and then "stay"
- c. The other person will hide – make it easy at first so your dog learns what the game is all about and then increase the difficulty
- d. When the person hiding is ready, they will call the dog the same way that adults call the dog (ie "Dog name, come!")
- e. When your dog has found the person hiding, big praise and excitement!



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- f. Switch turns
- g. If your dog starts to wander off or not seem too interested in finding the person, either make the hiding places easier or the pup is no longer interested in the game.

#### **2. Cups**

Get three identical cups from your kitchen, line them up in a row and hide a treat under one of them. Let your dog watch you put the treat underneath a cup so she can see there will be a reward to guessing correctly.

Then mix the cups up — the more challenging you want to make it, the more quickly you move the cups.

Let your dog select the right cup with her nose or paw and lift the cup up. If she is right, she wins the treat!

If she's not right, mix the cups up and try again. To start with, place treats under all three cups before reducing this down to two and then one. For an extra challenge, don't lift the cup up. Let your dog figure out how to knock it over to get the treat.

#### **3. Food Tube Scavenging**

All you need for this fun game are some extra toilet paper rolls (or paper towel rolls cut to size), and a box to arrange them in. Shoe boxes work the best, but any box will do! Watch this video to see how easy it is to make: <https://youtu.be/xxkgcije5s0>



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#### **Store Bought Games:**

1. **A flirt pole** is a wonderful tool especially if you have a young dog and children. This tool allows them to play together without the jumping and biting – essentially it's like a big cat toy for dogs! You can buy them on Amazon, but I like to make my flirt poles with a horse lunge whip and tie a stuffless toy at the end, or tie a toy at the end of a long leash and move it around.
2. **Toys that hide inside another** – some dogs really enjoy trying to get little critters out of the big stuffed toy, here is one of my favorites: [https://www.amazon.ca/Outward-Hound-Kyjen-31004-Ginormous/dp/B005VS9WO6/ref=asc\\_df\\_B005VS9WO6/?tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=292998808031&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=6120501197622110926&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9061009&hvtargid=pla-530423088872&pssc=1](https://www.amazon.ca/Outward-Hound-Kyjen-31004-Ginormous/dp/B005VS9WO6/ref=asc_df_B005VS9WO6/?tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=292998808031&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=6120501197622110926&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9061009&hvtargid=pla-530423088872&pssc=1)

- **OR MAKE YOUR OWN**

You can take your dog's favorite toys and hide them in blankets in a box as well!

3. **Treat Ball** – this is a great toy for dogs who don't often eat their kibble out of a bowl and keeps them busy while you get ready in the morning: [https://www.amazon.ca/Omega-Paw-Tricky-Treat-Orange/dp/B0002DK26M/ref=sxsts\\_sxwds-bia-wc-p13n1\\_0?cv\\_ct\\_cx=treat+ball&dchild=1&keywords=treat+ball&pd\\_rd\\_i=B0002DK26M&pd\\_rd\\_r=032bd5b3-3bb9-4029-8a96-e328310aae2d&pd\\_rd\\_w=tFaBh&pd\\_rd\\_wg=ahvwV&pf\\_rd\\_p=43a9c4d1-127a-4491-8ea0-641567812f17&pf\\_rd\\_r=N0EVC5NG3XTK4CBBAFNJ&pssc=1&qid=1596974614&sr=1-1-791c2399-d602-4248-afbb-8a79de2d236f](https://www.amazon.ca/Omega-Paw-Tricky-Treat-Orange/dp/B0002DK26M/ref=sxsts_sxwds-bia-wc-p13n1_0?cv_ct_cx=treat+ball&dchild=1&keywords=treat+ball&pd_rd_i=B0002DK26M&pd_rd_r=032bd5b3-3bb9-4029-8a96-e328310aae2d&pd_rd_w=tFaBh&pd_rd_wg=ahvwV&pf_rd_p=43a9c4d1-127a-4491-8ea0-641567812f17&pf_rd_r=N0EVC5NG3XTK4CBBAFNJ&pssc=1&qid=1596974614&sr=1-1-791c2399-d602-4248-afbb-8a79de2d236f)



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#### Calming Games

Need some ideas to help tire out your dog? These calming games will expend mental energy while also inducing endorphins and lowering cortisol (stress). These are great options if you need your dog to calm down at a certain time of day or when you have people over as well as a daily exercise for dogs who have stress/anxiety/overexcitement.

#### **The Muffin Tin Game (foraging, sniffing)**

This is a great boredom/anxiety buster that dogs love to play over and over again – and it's easier and cheaper than the already made games you can buy on Amazon!

##### What You Need

6 or 12 cup muffin tin

Balls or toys to cover each hole

Treats or kibble

#### **The Game**

To set up the game, place a treat in each hole of the muffin tin and then place a tennis ball on top of the treat. For standard size muffin tins, the tennis ball fits perfectly. The goal of the game is to encourage your dog to sniff for the treats and try to dislodge the tennis ball so he can get the treat.

Once the muffin tin is set up, place it on the floor and encourage your dog to check it out. You may have to slightly lift a ball so he can see and sniff the hidden treat. When he sees and smells it, drop the ball again and encourage him to find the treat. When he finds it, praise him!



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Bold, food-motivated dogs will learn this game quickly and will send tennis balls flying. Other dogs may need more encouragement, but that's okay. Remember, it's important that you play the game with your dog, so talk to him, show him where the treats are, and if needed, lift a tennis ball now and then.

One of the mental challenges of this game is for the dog to remember where he's found treats and where he hasn't. This is especially true if he rolls the tennis balls from one hole to another. Don't make it too easy by lifting the balls out yourself; let your dog figure it out.

When your dog has found all the treats, set up the game and play it again. If you use small treats, playing it twice a couple of times a week won't upset his normal diet.

#### **Egg Carton Game**

Egg carton game (basically the same as the muffin tin game but less noisy): fill the egg carton with kibble and/or treats and close it. Let Petrie figure out how to get the food (note: most dogs destroy it, which is part of the fun!)

#### **LickiMats**

These are rubber mats that you can smear wet dog food, peanut butter, cream cheese or other spreadable products so that your dog licks it off. Licking is a soothing action for dogs and is also a great way to slow down a fast eater, in addition to providing some entertainment. They are also great to use in the bathtub because they have suction cups on the back.

#### **Snuffle Mat**

this is a winner for all dogs – it is much like finding things in grass and can take your pup up to 20 minutes to finish it! You can use this in place of feeding them from a bowl by putting their kibble into the snuffle mat, or you can use treats any time of day. This is a great way to relax a hyper mind!

DIY Snuffle Mat – roll and fold up treats and/or kibble in a blanket and let your pup snuffle out the food.

Shaggy bath mats also work really well for this. You can hide the kibble in between the fabric.



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Or you can buy one at most pet stores and on Amazon.

#### **Treasure Hunting**

Getting your dog to use their nose is the best enrichment you can give them. Some dogs will be able to move through the steps below quickly, and some will need time to build their confidence. The key with the game is to keep it easy and fun and end it while your dog is still enjoying it. Once your dog is proficient at the game inside, take it outside!

#### ***Step One:***

Whether inside or outside, have your dog on a leash. Make sure you and your dog are looking in the same direction. While holding the leash, throw a couple of treats three or four feet in front and release your dog.

While your dog is eating the last treat, call him back and repeat two more times.

*Note: there is no cue at this time other than calling your dog back. This step is to help them understand the game without any verbal distractions.*

#### ***Step Two: Creating the trail***

Throw a treat, release your dog and then immediately throw another treat a few feet in front, then another and call your dog back after the third treat.

Repeat this step WITHOUT giving any verbal direction except calling your dog back.

*Note: if your dog cannot find a treat, that is ok. Don't help him or give direction. The next round, be sure to throw treats in that direction so he can find it as a bonus later.*

#### ***Step Three: Introducing the cue***



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Now that your pup has gotten the hang of this game, you can add your cue. Examples include “go find it!”, “get your treat!”, “find the treasure!”, etc.

Have your dog on leash and toss two treats ahead just like in step one. BEFORE releasing your dog say your cue (go find it! Find the treats, etc).

Repeat three times.

*Note: If you have done all three steps, this is a good time to stop for the day.*

#### ***Step Four: Increasing the Treat Radius***

If your dog has a solid “sit/stay” ask him to sit stay. If that is too difficult, you can tether your dog somewhere while you place treats in plain view while he watches you. If your dog is too stressed out to be tethered, you will need a second person to hold your dog for this step because you want him to see where you are putting the treats to set him up for success.

Once you have placed three or four treats in plain view, give your cue (go find it! Find the treats) and release your dog. Once he has found the last treat, call your dog back and repeat another round.

#### ***Step Five: The True Treasure Hunt***

Now you can hide the treats with your dog unable to see where you are putting them. For the first few rounds, make the treats visible or in places that you know your dog will look. While you are placing the treats, your dog should be in another room, in a covered crate or somewhere he can't see you.

When you have placed all the treats, give your cue and release your dog.

Once this becomes easy, start to hide the treats in harder areas to find. If your dog cannot find them all, that's ok, they can find them in another round. The key is not to lead the dog to the treats and to allow him to find them on his own.

#### ***Step Six: Taking it on the Road***



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When your dog can quickly find the treasures inside, time to take it outside to different environments. When you do this, start from Step One and move through to Step Five. Your dog will remember and you will be able to move through the steps quickly.

#### **Things to do with a Kong**

- **Peanut Butter** seems to be the most common Kong stuffing. It tastes great, it's usually already on hand, and it's texture and stickyness makes it a great, long lasting challenge for your dog. (make sure it doesn't contain [xylitol](#))
- **Store Bought [Kong Stuffing](#)** is a popular item at pet stores. It's available in a wide variety of flavors and comes in an easy to use spray can. (it's basically the Cheez Whiz of the dog world)
- **Broth** (chicken or beef are popular choices) is a great supplement when stuffing a Kong because you can easily freeze it. What I like to do is dab a bit of peanut butter over the hole in the bottom of the Kong, then place it upside down in a cup and fill with your liquid and freeze it for a couple hours.
- **Yogurt** is another popular choice for stuffing Kongs.
- **Canned Dog Food** can be used as a base when stuffing a Kong.
- **Kibble** is great, especially for dogs that are new to having a Kong. Most kibble is small enough that it will just easily fall out which encourages your dog to keep playing with it for more rewards.
- **Dog Treats** are a popular choice, and as you know they come in many shapes and sizes. Whether you're using your own [homemade dog treats](#) or some store bought ones all doggies seem to love some old fashioned treats.

(taken from [www.puppyleaks.com](http://www.puppyleaks.com))

#### **Give Your Dog Something to Chew**

Chewing is something that your dog needs to do their whole life. It's good for their jaws, muscles and teeth, but most importantly it is a calming activity. Here are some great ideas for chews:

- Dried sweet potato
- Bully sticks



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- Knuckle or tartar bones
- Gorilla chews (wood)
- Carrots
- Destroying boxes or papertowel rolls (as long as your dog doesn't eat the remnants)

Videos and Links:

#### **a. BRAIN GAMES:**

- i. Kongs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwZl1isnvPQ>
- ii. Taster Plate: <https://1drv.ms/v/s!AtbFr0Aly4vCxSL-SMS7JCkV8KVa?e=mlfIWu>
- iii. Snuffle mat: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yEud7lfjGI>
- iv. Muffin tin game & more: <https://cheerfulhound.com/blogs/blog-hound/dog-enrichment-made-easy-muffin-tin-game>

#### **b. CRATE GAMES:**

- i. <https://caninelearningacademy.com/fun-crate-games-for-your-puppy/>
- ii. <https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/crate-training-101>