

Finding Balance in Every Day

Enrichment - Training - Exercise + Rest

I often get asked... 'How much should I walk my dog?'

'How much should my puppy be sleeping?'

'Why is my puppy wild and seems unhinged?'

'How many frozen food-stuffed Kongs are too many in a day?'

'What is enrichment and does my dog need it?'

'How much training do I need to do in a day?'

'Why can't my dog just settle down?'

No matter what the question, my answer is pretty much always the same.

Keep everything in balance - life is like that for us and it's the same for our pets. It's all about balance.

All dogs or puppies can become a little bit cranky when things fall out of balance for them. Any time their routine is disrupted or is out of whack, they might have difficulty managing their day. This can show up in many ways. Dogs and puppies are resilient and adaptable to change but, just as we enjoy the stability of routine, they are the same.

Enrichment - Training - Exercise and of course, REST. These four components have equal importance and, when kept in balance, make for a happy well-adjusted dog.

Enrichment: What is it and why do they need it?

Both Training and Exercise can be considered as 'Enrichment', but I really like to separate them as it adds clarity to the importance of both and to dedicating the time to each. So, walking for exercise, sniffing, training and any other thing your dog finds rewarding and fun can be 'enriching'.

Enrichment: Activities that are both mentally and physically stimulating are vital for a dog's mental and physical well-being. You can engage all their senses - sounds, smells, taste and touch through Enrichment.

Creating activities that give our dogs the opportunity to engage in natural behaviors such as digging, sniffing, hanging out with other dogs, running about, chewing time, eating from a frozen food stuffed toy, walking, exploring new environments, and so much more can have amazing benefits.

- Promotes relaxation
- Strengthens the bond between you and your dog
- Can help prevent 'undesirable' behaviors
- Reduces anxiety

For many of us, a frozen food stuffed Kong or similar is a 'go to' for enrichment. When we work on crate training or 'settle mat' work during 'Place', we use these for both enrichment (super yummy and enjoyable) and as a reward. Snuffle Mats as slow feeders are equally enriching, especially for puppies learning to slow down while practicing their foraging skills.

Training: As a trainer, I am a firm believer in daily training for puppies and dogs, no matter the age. Engaging their mind prior to a walk can be very effective at moderating the 'crazy' of an over excited or exuberant puppy. A 10-minute training session at the front door while working on 'Wait' and then on your Release Cue can be super effective at helping your dog understand your expectations regarding their behaviour at the front door when it opens. We can also train 'Place' near the front door, giving them a targeted area to park themselves, and be rewarded for doing so, while company comes through the door.

Whatever training sequences you use, make sure they are skill level appropriate for your puppy/dog's age and that each session is engaging and fun!

For most puppies/dogs, we should aim for 3-5 sessions that are 10-20 mins. In length - keeping the session long enough to gain success in the skills we are working on and short enough not to create a state of overstimulation in our youngest puppies. Aim for 10-15 mins each for young puppies and 15-20+ mins for more mature dogs.

Exercise: Walking? Running? Playtime? Fetch?

There can be a fine line between getting enough exercise for your dog and pushing them over the limit into a state of frenzied overstimulation.

Distractions? New area? Super smells?

Over-walking a dog can create a level of overstimulation they can't manage. On a walk, it might come out as the dog grabbing and mouthing at the leash.

We should consider how far we are walking the dog, if it is a very busy area or if there will be numerous distractions.

Take all of this into consideration and adjust what you're doing, to create an environment where they can be successful. There's no hard and fast rule as to what a walk must look like or the distance you have to travel. It is a walk for both you and your dog and you both should enjoy it.

For young puppies I will often shorten the walk but make it 'training heavy' - filled with a lot of skills the puppy and I can work on together. Skills work = confidence for both puppies and dogs, so why not put the skills to practice during a walk? It's the perfect time to work on getting and keeping their attention!

Training walks create a level of 'brain drain' that takes the first layer of crazy off the top before you even head out the door to go for a walk.

Put the 'Sniff for Reward' on Cue - use sniffing as a reward. This is very rewarding when you tie it to a Cue like 'Go Sniff', after the dog has executed a Sit or Watch Me or another skill that you ask them for.

Another example would be Playing Fetch! This can be a wonderful sequence of skills to get their brain 'warmed up' before a walk

Being **STILL** on a walk... Be still on a walk? Yes absolutely! Be an observer and help your dog or puppy to become an observer as well. Learning calmness on a walk is so important for our dogs.

Rest: This is something that can be overlooked in our busy daily lives. All of us need rest, whether we think so or not! Make sure your dogs are getting enough rest to keep them happy and healthy!

So, remember, be mindful of your dog's capacity when it comes to training and exercise and always try to add in some engaging enrichment to fulfill their days!

Happy Training!

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