

## Decompression – Tips to Help You and Your Dog Unwind

We all need a break sometimes. Whether it's a quiet weekend with Netflix, a vacation to recharge, or simply a day without obligations, humans understand the value of decompression. But what we often forget is that our dogs need time to unwind, too — and not just when they first arrive in a new home.

Decompression is essential for dogs who are new to a home, shelter, or foster placement, but it's also incredibly beneficial as a regular part of their routine. This is especially true for dogs living in busy urban environments or those who struggle with fear, anxiety, or overstimulation. For adolescent dogs — who are often bouncing between high energy and emotional overwhelm — structured decompression days can make a noticeable difference in their behavior and ability to learn.

I learned this firsthand with my own dog, a high-energy Vizsla who loved city life but also found it overwhelming. Between 8 and 12 months old, we began incorporating one or two decompression days into our weekly routine. These weren't lazy days where she was left to sleep all day — we filled them with calming, low-arousal activities that helped her settle mentally and physically. As a result, she became more focused during training and more relaxed on walks.

I have suggested decompression days to clients who reacted with skepticism but, after doing decompression with their dog, they have all been very pleased with the difference in focus, behavior and overall enjoyment of their dog.

### So, what does a decompression day look like?

Think of it as a “Netflix and chill” day for your dog — without the screen time, of course. Here are some easy ways to help your dog decompress:

- **Calming Activities:** Focus on natural stress-relievers like sniffing, licking, and chewing. Try snuffle mats, stuffed Kongs, safe chew toys, or even simple games like hiding food or treats around your house for your dog to find.
- **Brain Games:** Try problem-solving games or trick training sessions. Even something simple like the [101 Things to Do With a Box](#) game or teaching your dog to [wipe their paws](#) can keep their brain busy without overstimulating them.
- **Practice Training Skills Indoors:** Decompression days are a perfect time to work on basic skills in a calm, low-distraction environment. Practice things like leash walking, hand targeting, recall (hide and seek is a great recall game!), or cues like “drop it” and “leave it.” This builds confidence, reinforces good habits, and helps your dog learn more effectively.

- **Skip the Walk:** Yes, really. There's nothing wrong with skipping a walk. If your dog is overstimulated, overwhelmed, or you're not feeling well, low-key enrichment around the home or backyard can be more beneficial than a stressful outing.

One of the best ways to prepare for a decompression day is to make a list of the things your dog enjoys doing or learning. Keep it handy so you can plan an indoor day that will truly delight your dog, without going out and about. When you build the day around what brings your dog joy and comfort, it becomes not just a rest day, but a bonding opportunity and a gift to their well-being.

Decompression is not about doing nothing — it's about creating space for your dog to relax, reset, and regulate. For rescue dogs, who may already be coping with stress, change, and new environments, regular decompression days are a simple but powerful way to support their emotional health.

So next time your schedule feels too full for a big adventure, don't feel guilty. Give your dog a day off. Put on something cozy, grab a chew toy or puzzle feeder, and embrace the beauty of doing less — together.



**Andrea Dinan**, CPDT-KA, LFDM-T, FFCT

In addition to the certifications above, Andrea is certified through the Karen Pryor Foundations and Kids Around Dogs, and she has also taken the Masters Course in Dog Aggression through AggressiveDog.com. She is the founder of EduCanine and City Dogs Training & Behavior and also created "The Rescue Plan."