

Covid 19

24 March 2019

Services update

With the escalation of the Covid 19 virus, it's impact and the need to beat it, and following Government instructions, we are **closed for all non-essential services** with immediate effect, **but...**

Designated key workers, other essential workers and home bound dog owners with no other means of support

As long as we are healthy, and unless we are instructed otherwise, or find we are no longer insured, we will provide limited services, where we can safely operate, **solely** for designated key workers, other essential workers and individuals with dogs who are home bound (eg underlying health risks) at this time.

- Where we are providing a limited service to a 'keyworker'. This may include NHS workers, police, supermarket workers, teachers providing limited teaching services and your dog needs to be walked during your shift. Key worker definitions can be found on the gov.uk website - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>
- Where we are providing care to a dog owned by someone who cannot walk the dog themselves. This may be an elderly person. This has been advised by the RSPCA in the 'Can I walk my dog question' - <https://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/latest/blogs/details/-/articleName/how-to-care-for-your-pets-if-you-re-ill-or-have-to-self-isolate-due-to-coronavirus>

Basic safety processes

- We will operate the minimum 2m safe distance rule at all times.
- We will not come into homes.
- We will wear face masks/scarves and gloves where we can.
- We will wash our hands with soap and water between bookings.
- We will use antibacterial wipes and sanitizers to clean anything before we touch it
- We will NOT carry out services if we suspect we may be unwell, or knowingly have been in contact with anyone who is unwell
- We will walk on our own or with people we live with
- We will only use our leads.
- We will disinfect equipment, transport and apply a Defra approved pet safe anti-viral misting spray to the coat of your pet at the beginning and end of every service cycle.

- Where consent has been provided in writing for your dog to be allowed an off-lead walk, this will only happen where we can avoid any engagement with other humans or dogs from other parties whilst out on our walk.

We are sorry for any inconvenience during this exceptional time. Ultimately, the health and well-being of you and your family are of paramount importance.

We will be back as soon as it is safe.... and like you, we can't wait.

In the meantime... your pet's welfare is vitally important.

Here is some advice for looking after your pet during this time.

Things to do to help your pet during Covid 19 isolation

Your pet's physical and mental health are hugely important.

Physical health

This is influenced by your pet's breed, age, health and environment. And during the lockdown, this is probably going to be the most challenging limitation for you and your pet. Use your exercise opportunity wisely and responsibly.

If you have an enclosed garden, that is escape proof (bored pets get resourceful) then that's going to help.

A tired dog is a happy and well-mannered dog. The daily walk is a great way to provide some of their physical activity, mental stimulation and bonding time. The walk gives them the opportunity to explore and take in the sights, sounds, and smells. In addition, it gives them the chance of meeting other dogs on their journey while using some physical energy. Try to vary your walk and go to new places to keep the walks interesting for your dog, and for you!

Remember, that whilst there is no evidence that a dog can pass on the virus either to another pet or human, we would be naive if we didn't minimise risks. A pet that is in close proximity to a Covid 19 infected human or where a pet might have been exposed to the virus, might briefly carry the virus on their fur, so minimising this threat is very important.

Mental health

Canine enrichment is defined as additions to a dog's environment and lifestyle that which the dog voluntarily interacts and, as a result, experiences improved physical and psychological health. Although this sounds complex it is simply adding actions or items to a dog's environment for their benefit.

Why is enrichment for dogs important?

It is essential for dogs to receive mental enrichment and mind stimulation. This provides for their psychological and physical well-being rather than sleeping all day or becoming bored and destructive.

When you compare the lives of animals in nature, there is a huge difference in their activity levels. Animals in nature fill their days with challenging activities such as hunting, scavenging, foraging and gathering food. Even with the best of intentions, our busy lifestyles seldom provide our dogs with the level of activity and mental enrichment they need.

The benefits of dog enrichment include –

- Prevent boredom that may result in behaviour issues such as destructive behaviour, nuisance barking or even escaping.
- Stimulate and assists in brain growth.
- Improves your dog's problem-solving skills.
- Builds confidence and social skills.
- Allows your dog to be a dog engaging in natural and instinctive behaviours.
- Allows for a more balanced and happier dog. Lack of stimulation and enrichment can lead to depression.

Doing little or nothing towards their needs is a recipe for disaster. If your dog is bored and frustrated by the lack of stimulation you will find out very quickly. Dogs need an outlet for their minds. If they are not provided the opportunity to challenge their minds, they will come up with their own ways to achieve this. This usually manifests itself in bad behaviour such as excessive barking, digging, escaping and other destructive behaviours.

6 types or categories of enrichment for dogs

There are 6 defined categories of mental enrichment from which you can choose to work with. You can use all or a selected number to provide that much needed mental enrichment. Some activities can be included in more than one category, for example, scenting work which can be considered cognitive enrichment and sensory enrichment depending on the exercise they are doing.

The 6 categories of mental enrichment for dogs are:-

Social enrichment for dogs

This provides the opportunity for your dog to spend time with other dogs and animals, and people often in different environments. Dogs are social animals and offleash play with other dogs improves their skills at interacting. It also reduces the chances of developing reactivity and fear-based communication issues. Social interaction helps build self-confidence and trust.

This social enrichment can be achieved by going for trips to new locations such as the beach or the pet store.

Cognitive enrichment for dogs

This provides the opportunity for thinking and problem-solving activities that challenge the brain. Give your dog challenges like a **puzzle or interactive toy**, scenting and nose work or games such as hide and seek or treasure hunt. Give them learning opportunities such as teaching new commands or tricks or teach them the names of each of their toys. It is not true that an old dog can't learn new tricks. If you've not seen a video on the disappearing pet human – try this - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0hETFY67F0>

Physical or environmental enrichment for dogs

This is anything that enhances your dog's living space. Adding new things to your dog's environment can help to keep things a little more interesting. Suggestions may include:

Digging pit – Using a toddler paddling pool filled with sand for them to dig around in. You can even hide their toys for them to find.

Tunnels and things, they can hide under - Use a tunnel-like the ones used in dog agility

Mirror – some dogs love playing with the dog in the mirror.

Feeding enrichment for dogs - By using your dog's nose and brain, you can encourage them to use their natural hunting and foraging skills at mealtime. You don't have to feed your dog in a bowl. By putting their food in a **puzzle food dispensing toy** or hiding it under a blanket your dog will be happy to work for their food.

Toy enrichment for dogs

This includes providing toys that can be manipulated with their paws or mouth to get a reward. This is usually food or a treat, but you can do things like putting their toy in a closed cardboard box and they have to figure out how to get to it. Other toy-related suggestions may include ...

Remote and wind-up toys – supervise your dog for this as they may bite the toy to pieces and swallow the mechanics.

Flirt pole – is like a bigger version of a cat tickler with a stick and rope with a lure or toy attached to the end. Move the lure or toy along the ground in circles or different directions and your dog will chase. This one is very popular with terriers and ratting breeds as it uses the very skills they would use to catch vermin.

Chew toys and bones – chewing is naturally very calming for dogs as they can hold stress in their jaw.

Introduce new toys – giving your dog a new toy will spark curiosity and interest.

There's a great range of dog toys on Amazon

Sensory Enrichment for dogs

Sensory enrichment is anything that stimulates your dog's five senses which are sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. Any sort of nose work would be included in this category.

Other possible suggestions can include:-

Chicken or beef stock – splash some chicken or beef stock around the property. It is best to dilute this a fair amount as stocks can be high in sodium. Alternatively, use peanut butter or something similar.

Chasing bubbles – some dogs absolutely love this game. You can actually buy bacon and other flavours of bubble solutions just for dogs.

Rolled up towel - Hiding put aside treats or kibble from your pet's mealtime, in a rolled up towel for your pet to 'forage' is another good activity as dogs love to forage.

Hide & Seek - Hiding treats in mint and cinnamon (non-toxic herbs) in your herbs bed.

Other inspiration – in case Amazon are not delivering or money is even more tight.

Dogs are smart animals and it is crucial that we provide them with plenty of mental stimulation to exercise their brains. If they don't get to use their brains, they can quickly get bored and a bored dog may start to develop a wide range of problem behaviours!

So what do we mean by canine enrichment? Enrichment improves and enhances your dog's mental state using a range of activities designed to challenge and exercise their brains. These activities encourage your dog to problem solve, learn new skills and become more confident.

Most importantly, they love it!

You can see some of our favourite ideas here; they needn't cost a fortune nor do you have to be particularly creative to create something fun for your dog. We recommend you enjoy the activity with your dog and keeping them under close supervision.

Kongs

Kongs are a fantastic source of mental enrichment and a great way to make mealtimes more fun. Your dog's usual diet can be packed into a Kong for them to figure out and they can even be frozen for a tougher challenge. You can also put treats or things such as doggy-friendly peanut butter or liver paste into the Kong. They come in a range of shapes and sizes, offering different challenges. Enrichment should be challenging but not frustrating; so we would recommend starting off fairly easy and gradually increasing the difficulty of the Kong as your dog starts to get the hang of it.

Puzzle games and interactive feeders

It's great to feed dogs using a puzzle, interactive game, Kong or slow feeder bowl. Not only does this make mealtimes more fun, it also slows down even the quickest of eaters! Again, there are a wide range of these puzzle type feeders on the market of all different difficulty levels. They don't have to just be used for mealtimes either; they can also be given as an extra treat.

Snuffle mats

Snuffle mats are a fantastic source of enrichment and, better yet, you can easily make your own one at home. No sewing required! You will need a rubber mat with holes (door mats or bath mats work well) and 2 fleece blankets cut into strips. The length of the strips can vary to tailor to your dog. You simply then thread each end of the fleece strip into adjacent or diagonal holes and tie on top. You repeat this process until all the holes are covered and voila! Your snuffle mat is ready to go; simply sprinkle treats onto the mat and enjoy watching your dog search for the treats.

Cardboard boxes, tubes and plastic bottles

Enrichment can be made from almost anything around the house. You can fill a cardboard box with toys, treats and newspaper to make a search game. A toilet roll tube can have treats inside with the ends of the tube squashed in. You can drop treats or kibble into a plastic bottle for a cheap and easy activity toy; just make sure to remove the ring and cap first and keep a close eye on your dog, especially those powerful chewers! Get the kids to help you make them – a great diversion from home classes.

Scatter Feeding

Dogs love having to hunt and forage for their food and scatter feeding can be a great way to satisfy this urge. Simply sprinkle their kibble or treats around the house and let your dog search it out.

Think of the breed

Some problems can arise in a home when we don't consider or value breed traits and what the dog was originally bred for. Although they are unlikely to be 'at work', the natural urge to perform such behaviours may be strong, even in domestic pets, and your dog will get a great amount of satisfaction from activities that keep their breed traits in mind. For instance, Labradors were originally bred to retrieve, Spaniels to track scents and Terriers to hunt out vermin.

Games can be made from almost anything in the home, so you can use your imagination. An indoor ball pit with treats scattered in can satisfy the natural urge to dig. Hide and seek games, using upturned flowerpots or buckets to hide treats or toys, can be great for those that love to track things down and retrieve.

Trick Training

Dogs love positive reward-based training so why not teach them a trick or two. Stock up on plenty of yummy treats and keep training sessions relatively short. Keep your expectations realistic and keep the task light-hearted and both you and your pooch will have great fun together.

Conclusion

Mental enrichment opportunities have to offer variety and a constant challenge. No matter how much fun they find something, doing it over and over will eventually become boring. Dogs are an intelligent animal and they need activity and mental stimulation that continues to offer a challenge. Be sure to switch up the mental games and activities to keep them feeling fresh and new. With a little imagination, there are countless ways to provide this crucial mental enrichment and mind stimulation for your dog.

A frustrated and bored dog is a dog that is unhappy and that will usually lead to problem behaviour. Overall health is in body and mind, and by ensuring that your dog gets both physical exercise and mental enrichment, and the right amount it will make life better for both you and your dog.

Good luck and we hope to see you again very soon. Stay safe.