

17 Brain Games To Stimulate



Your
Dog



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PREFACE

Like Snicker's famous slogan, "*You're not you when you're hungry*"...

Dogs also become '*someone else*' when bored.

They develop destructive behaviors to release their energy and frustration.

So to prevent this from happening to your pooch...

What are things you can do to keep your dog entertained?

Continue reading to learn:

- 17 best brain games to entertain your fur baby.
- Safe toys you can give to your dog to prevent boredom.
- Easy-to-follow steps to create homemade toys for your Fido.
- And a lot more...

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17 Brain Games For Dogs To Entertain Your Fur Baby

#1: Treasure hunt



Sense of smell is essential for dogs.

With only a sniff, canines know what kind of Fido has been in a place before them.

This includes information about the other dog's:

- Gender.
- Health status.
- And even mood.

Not to mention the doggos who can also sniff bombs and diseases.

"How do they do it?"

According to vets, dogs have a dedicated part in their brains for interpreting odors. And it's 40 times as large as ours.^[1]

So to get your Fido's brain working, encourage them to use their nose.

And one easy way to do it is by playing '*treasure hunt*.'

The goal of this game is for your dog to find hidden treasures, a.k.a. treats, in the room.

By doing this, your Fido can test their natural sniffing abilities. Plus, it's also a great way to bond with and exercise them.

What to do?

1. Pick a room.
2. Make your dog wait outside.
3. Hide pieces of treats or kibbles inside your chosen place. It can be:
 - On the sofa.
 - Behind a table's leg.
 - On the seat of a chair.
 - On top of a drawer handle.
4. Call your Fido and bring them inside the room.
5. Let them find the hidden treats.
6. Say praises and act excited when your dog finds each of them.

Also, make the game a bit harder once your dog gets the hang of it.

"How?"

Hide the kibbles in other challenging places. Say:

- Buried in their bowl.
- Under blankets or pillows.

- Inside a container or cardboard box.

#2: Hide and seek

Dogs can also enjoy playing hide and seek like little kids.


Plus, this game puts their nose and scent analyzing abilities to the test.

What's more, a study found that most dogs prefer their parents and getting praised by them over food.^[2]

So your Fido might even be more excited to look for you over treats.

What to do?

1. Ask at least one more person to play with you and your dog.

 **Note:** The other player must be someone familiar to your Fido. And your dog should know both of your names too.

2. Get your Fido to “sit” and “stay.”
3. Let the other person hide while you're with your dog.
4. Tell your Fido to “find” the other player. Or make the person call your dog.
5. If your pooch finds the correct person, shower them with rewards.
6. Repeat, but this time, you'll be the ‘hider.’

#3: ‘Which hand’ game

Want another easy brain game to entertain your fur baby at home?


Then, try making your dog find a hidden treat in your hands.

What to do?

To do this game, you only need treats and yourself.

1. Get some kibbles or dog snacks.
2. Ask your Fido to “sit” and “stay” in front of you.
3. Show a piece of kibble to your dog.
4. Hide it in one of your hands.
5. Close and make your fists face downward.
6. Extend your hands to your dog and ask them, “*which hand?*”
7. If your Fido touches the correct one, open your hands and give them the treat.

But if your dog answers wrongly, open your hands. Then repeat the steps and make them try again.

 **Note:** It's alright if your pooch doesn't get the game quickly. Be consistent, and only reward them if they touch the correct hand.

#4: ‘Shell game’



Don't worry. There are no shells involved in this nose work.

It's only another term for the '*cup game*.'

What to do?

1. Get some yummy-smelling dog snacks.
2. Put at least 3 cups or '*shells*' on the floor.
3. Line them in front of you and your dog.
4. Command your Fido to assume the "*sit*" and "*stay*" position.
5. Show your dog that you hid food under one of the shells.
6. Shuffle the cups.
7. Ask your Fido to find the treat.

#5: '*Hot and cold*'

You may have played this when you were young. It's a game similar to a treasure hunt. But in this version, you won't let your dog search for the hidden snacks alone.

Instead, you'll guide them until they find the treats.

How?

Say "*cold*" gently when your dog's far from the treat you hid.

Then say "*hot*" in a higher pitch or excited tone if they're close to the hidden snack.

"How will this game help my dog?"

It won't only test your Fido's sense of smell.

But it'll also help improve their listening skills and your bond together.

#6: Stuffed Kong

Next, this is a classic toy that keeps dogs engaged for hours. Well. You would expect nothing less from a chewy toy with a yummy filling.

[Kong toys](#) are strong and dog-safe. So your Fido can chew on and lick it as much they want.

Plus, you can stuff yummy treats inside, such as:

- Dry kibbles.
- Peanut butter.
- Canned dog food.

You can also freeze the Kong. Then make your dog think of ways to get and eat the snack inside.

Also, since it'll keep your Fido busy, they'll be less bored and destructive. So it's a perfect toy if you'll be leaving them for a while.

#7: Dog puzzle toys



Dogs are food-motivated.

It's one of the reasons why they're selected to live with us. And it also makes training them a lot easier.

So if you browse the Internet, you'll also see various dog puzzle toys.

These come in different sizes and levels of difficulty. But they have one thing in common.

"What is it?"

Like the other games above, you must hide treats under the puzzle's components.

Then let your dog find and get the snacks on their own.

What to do?

For starters, pick an [easy \(level 1\) dog puzzle](#) first.

Then slowly adjust the difficulty as you go on. And try these:

1. [Intermediate \(Level 2\) Interactive Treat Puzzle Dog Toy.](#)
2. [Advanced \(Level 3\) Interactive Treat Puzzle Dog Toy.](#)
3. [Expert \(Level 4\) Interactive Treat Puzzle Dog Toy.](#)

"When's the right time for puzzle toys?"

You can let your Fido use it during playtime. Or you may also swap it to their food bowl during meals to keep them entertained and challenged.

#8: Treat dispensing toys

As I said, you can never go wrong with toys and treats.

So besides a Kong, you may leave a snack-dispensing toy to your pooch, too, when they're alone.

It'll make your dog think about how they can get the treats inside it.

So playing it will keep them mentally stimulated for a long time.

These come in different shapes and sizes.

If you're interested, you may choose the one below that best fits your Fido:

- [HIPPIH Treat Dispensing Dog Toys.](#)
- [Aelflane Barbell-Shaped Treat Dispensing Puzzle Toy.](#)
- [Nina Ottosson Small Treat-Dispensing Puzzle Dog Toy.](#)

"What are its other benefits?"

Mental enrichment is one thing.

But you'll also wear your dog out for making them use their brains for so long.

So, in the end, you'll have a content, sleepy Fido.

Plus, your pooch can't easily chew toys like this. So you don't have to worry about getting a new one soon.

#9: DIY food-dispensing toy

Want to be more creative in entertaining your dog?

If you have tissue paper tubes at home, you can also make a toy out of them.

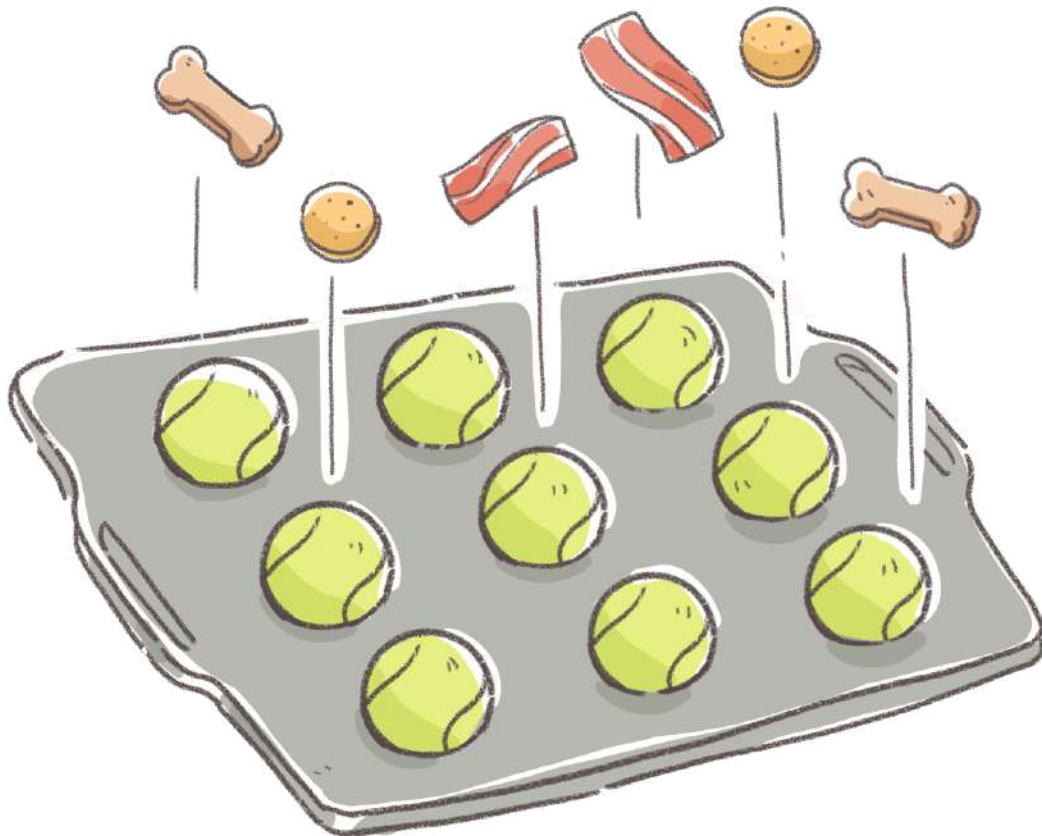
It's a win-win situation for you and your pooch.

You'll be able to reuse and recycle trash. And at the same time, your Fido will be happy to have a new toy.

What to do?

1. Get an empty tissue tube and some treats.
2. Show and let your dog sniff the snacks.
3. Put some treats inside the tissue tube.
4. Crumple up both ends of the tube to close it.
5. Give it to your dog and let them get the treats inside.

#10: Muffin tin and tennis balls



Here's another DIY brain game for your dog.

You can create your own interactive puzzle toy with only a muffin tin and some tennis balls.

What to do?

1. Get [a clean muffin tin](#) or cupcake tray.
2. Put small pieces of treats in all of its pockets.
3. Place the [tennis balls](#) over the snacks. Ensure that all pockets have a ball covering them.
4. Set the muffin tray on the floor.
5. Allow your dog to sniff and retrieve the treats under the balls.



Note: Take out one ball to help your Fido understand the game. Then reveal the treats inside. Do this to let your dog know something yummy under those balls.

#11: Snuffle mat

Dogs enjoy sniffing and discovering things.

So your curious Fido might like a game where they can use their foraging skills.

And what better toy to give them than a '*snuffle mat*'?

"What is it?"

You may have already seen it before.

The [snuffle mat is made of sewn strips](#) of non-slip cloth.

It resembles grass so that you can hide treats there. And your dog can mimic the hunt for food on the mat.



Note: Playing with snuffle mats is a low-impact activity. Your dog will only use their brain and nose here. So it's ideal for dogs who are aging or have mobility issues.

#12: 'Red light, green light'

We're now getting to the brain games with a higher difficulty level.

But if you have a reactive pooch when on a leash, this game might help you solve it.

"What does it do?"

This game aims to teach your dog the difference between *"red light"* and *"green light."*

And as their names imply, the former means stop.

Meanwhile, the latter means go.

So if your overly excited Fido masters this, controlling them outside will be easier.

And during the training, you'll keep your dog busy and entertained.

What to do?

1. Ask your Fido to *"sit"* or *"stay."*
2. Say *"green light."*
3. Make your dog move. (E.g., run around, lure with a toy or treat.)
4. Play with your Fido for a while until you say the next word.
5. Say *"red light"* and command your dog to *"lie down"* or *"sit"* right after.
6. Repeat.

Do this game for at least 5 to 10 minutes. And until your Fido learns the magic words for go and stop.

#13: Ring stacking toy



This toy doesn't only help human toddlers in their development.

It can also aid dogs in learning proper eye-to-paw coordination.

But take note, this game has a high difficulty level. So patience is the key here.

What to do?

To train your dog to stack rings, you'll need:

- Treats.
- A [clicker](#).
- A [ring stacking toy](#).

And here's how you'll do it.

Step #1: Familiarize your dog with the stick

Show it to your Fido and touch its top. Then, encourage your dog also to nudge the stick.

When they do, say “yes” and reward them.

Step #2: Introduce the rings to your Fido

Next, throw the biggest ring and ask your dog to “*fetch*” it.

Again, say “yes” and give them a treat when they bring it to you.

Step #3: Make your dog drop the ring close to the stick

Toss the ring away. Then say “yes” when your Fido fetches it.

Point to the stick. And only reward your dog when they put the ring near the shaft.

Step #4: Reinforce the behavior

Always act excited and praise your dog if they drop the ring close to the stick.

Do it, intentional or by accident, to reinforce the action.

Step #5: Stack the other rings

Once your dog masters the steps above, add more rings to the stack.

But again, be patient as smaller rings can be harder to teach.

#14: Learning new tricks

You can also entertain your fur baby by teaching them new things.

Plus, spending time together will strengthen your bond.

And also, learning new tricks can help boost your dog's confidence.

"But how?"

Dogs are also satisfied when they accomplish something.

May it be learning how to sit. Or fetching a ball to their human.

So, did your Fido master the basic commands?

If yes, here are some new tricks you can teach them:

- *"Paw."*
- *"Bow."*
- *"Spin."*
- *"Speak."*
- *"Roll over."*
- *"Shake hands."*

#15: 'New word' game

Do you have those moments when your Fido seemed to understand what you were saying?

Well, sometimes, you might not be delusional. And your dog indeed had a grasp of the things you said.

"Really?"

Do dogs understand us?"

I found this study saying that average dogs know around 85 words without proper training.^[3]

Meanwhile, research shows that a trained pooch can learn more than 200 words.^[4]

So aside from tricks, teach your Fido some new names too.

What to do?

1. Choose a quiet room where you can train.
2. Begin with easy words first, like:
 - “Sit.”
 - “Ball.”
 - “Stay.”
 - “Down.”
3. Say the word and point to the object or person it refers to.
4. Reward your dog when they pay attention to it.
5. Repeat to help your Fido make the correct association.


#16: ‘Get the toy’ game



Once your Fido knows what a “toy” is, you can do this next.

What to do?

1. Say “*get your toy*” or “*fetch your toy*” to your dog.
2. Once they do, point to the area where you want them to place it.
3. If they go to the right place, say “*drop it.*”
4. Give your dog praises and treats.

 **Note:** This game is also on the hard side. But if you’re consistent, you’ll raise your Fido’s confidence. And they could succeed in the end.

#17: Agility course

Lastly, do you have an athletic pooch?

Then, you might want to teach them to go through an obstacle course.

It’s an excellent way to exercise your Fido. Plus, it’ll also stimulate their brain.

What to do?

You may get an [agility training kit](#) online. And check these guidelines from AKC.^[5]

But if you have time, you can also do a DIY course at home.

For example, plan a route indoor or outdoor. Then arrange baskets, tables, chairs, or toys based on it.

However, start with an easy course for your pooch first. And observe how well your dog does.

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