



Meeting a dog's needs

Physical activity

In general, dogs enjoy using their noses to sniff and find out new information. Many dogs love to chew. Sniffing for treats, chewing and licking food out of food toys can be calming for some dogs. Such activities can be a great way to wind down after play.

Scent training, tracking and nose work can be very enjoyable for some dogs. Some dogs love running and enjoy chasing games or agility work. Some herding breed dogs love to round things up. Some dogs love social play and wrestling with other dogs and human caregivers. However, all these preferences are broad generalisations. Let your dog tell you what they like.

Caregivers need to consider the physical and mental health of their dog when providing stimulation. Dogs who are in pain may suffer when offered too much physical activity. Another way of viewing this problem is that a dog who will not be physically active may be in pain, so should be checked by a veterinarian.

Some dogs have mental health disorders that affect their ability to cope in some situations. Animals who are difficult to handle, exhibit aggression or seem scared may have a mental or physical health issue. As such, offering that type of stimulation can be detrimental and the animal should see a veterinarian for advice before being put in that situation again. These animals do not “get over it” or “need socialising” - they need help.

Feeding

If given the choice, dogs prefer to eat three times a day. Some aggression problems related to food are simply due to lack of food. Increased hunger increases the risk of aggression.

Dogs should be fed at least twice a day with the provision of food in between the two meals. This does not mean more food. Simply divide the dog's daily food ration into two meals, and provide some of the food in food toys.

Resting

Bed should be a place where an animal feels secure. A dog's bed can be the dog's designated "safe space". Caregivers can make a rule that their dog is not approached when the dog is on the dog bed. By doing so, a dog can go to its bed to relax or to get away from a stressful environment.

Sleeping

Dogs need more sleep than people. They tend to be more active in the early morning and in the afternoon/evening. They often sleep in naps, mostly at night, but also during the day.

Caregivers often worry that they don't provide enough stimulation for their dog. However, they then risk providing too much stimulation, so their dog is sleep deprived. This is a big problem for puppies, who need more sleep.

People who work from home need to recognise their dog's need for sleep. Lack of sleep affects an animal's ability to regulate its emotional state, which can lead to behaviour problems.

Simple rules so a dog can feel secure at home (and aggression risk)

Anxiety is often the underlying cause of aggression from dogs. Having a safe place where a dog can calm down and where no person can approach the dog can reduce the risk of aggression while also improving the dog's welfare.

Similarly, dogs can feel anxious if others may take their food, so aggression can increase around the food bowl. Leaving a dog alone with its food can reduce the risk of food-related aggression.

Rules that help a dog have security around its basic needs can improve safety for children. Dog bites to children under six years old usually come from a dog known to the child. Dog bites are more likely to occur when a child approaches a dog who is eating or resting.