

## Alternative Exercise: Mental Stimulation for your Dog

Just because the snow is coming and the weather is getting colder doesn't mean your dog needs to get any less exercise. While continued walks and romps in the snow are ideal for physical exercise, there are also a lot of ways to mentally tire your dog out inside your home! As is often reported after a group training class, or a private in-home session with clients, the mental work training requires is exhausting for dogs! Dog's stamina quickly adapts to routine physical exercise but their brains rarely ever adapt in the same way to learning something new. Here are a few relatively simple ideas:

Try **training new behaviors**. This will both mentally exhaust your dog and it sure will come in handy in the future! Some both physically and mentally exhausting ideas include: Go to bed, Come when called, and Leave it. Clicker training can also be a really fun way of teaching new behaviors! If you don't know how to train these, please contact a positive trainer in your area or check out my shortened list of recommended resources at the end of this article.

Even more fun than teaching obedience, both for guardian and dog, is **teaching tricks**. Tricks are exhausting but also more motivating than "commands". Technically tricks and commands are the same thing, but our attitude towards teaching them and showing them off seems to be different. Some relatively simple examples to try include: Roll over; Touch; Spin; Bow; Dance; High Five/High Ten



**Find it games** can also be a lot of fun. Start off by having your dog by your side, having a few treats in your hand, toss the treats down to scatter on the floor as you say "find it". Graduate this to having your dog either do a sit-stay at a distance while you toss the treats down and release them to "find it" or have a helper hold your dog while you toss the treats before telling them to "find it" and releasing them. From there, you can either be sneaky and hide a tasty treat while your dog is elsewhere, call them in the room and tell them to find it (encouraging them along the way) OR have a helper hold them out of sight and do the same thing. Find it games are great because they also use their sense of smell to their advantage! Exhausting!

**Meeting new people, places, or other dogs** is a great idea to wear out your dog. Socializing can be exhausting (this also holds true for people)! Plus, meeting new people, other dogs, or going to new places really stimulates their mind and increases their social circle (of course, this is assuming you have a dog who enjoys the socializing)

**Treat dispensing toys and puzzle toys** are great ways to both feed your dog breakfast or dinner and really make them work for it, tiring them out in the process. What I'm talking about here are not so much stuffed kongs, but rather toys that need to be pushed around in a certain way in order to get the food to be pushed out. See my specific recommendations at the end of this article.



Similar to the toys just described, **bones and stuffed toys** (such as Kongs or marrow bones) are great too. Ice toys are a great alternative, especially for crate time. Ice toys are very simple to make and basically consist of kibble in a Tupperware bowl. Add in a couple of cookies, carrots, globs of peanut butter, safe toys, and/or whatever else you think your dog might enjoy (really get creative here!), then add an inch or two of water (depending on the size of your dog and their motivation to get to the food). Freeze it all overnight and the next day, pop it out and let them have at it! Chewing tends to be very relaxing for a dog so giving them something to really work on for a while can really calm them down and of course keep them mentally and physically busy!

Those are just a few ideas for simple ways to really give your dogs some mental stimulation as well as the slightly harder to come by physical stimulation during the winter months. Please feel free to contact me if you would like specific ideas for how to teach your dogs any of the above behaviors or see the following **resources**:

YouTube.com – Look up “dog tricks” and you will get all kinds of good ideas!

**Books:**

101 Dog Tricks: Kyra Sundance  
The Culture Clash: Jean Donaldson  
Quick Clicks: Mandy Book & Cheryl Smith  
Play With Your Dog: Pat Miller

**Favorite Treat Dispensing Toys:**

Tricky Paw  
Bob-A-Lot

Also, please check out my Amazon site for a list of recommended products:  
<http://astore.amazon.com/missbeha-20>