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## Is your dog bored?

**The vast majority of problems dog owners experience with their dogs originate in the dogs not being given enough mental stimulation - they are bored with too little to do that makes sense for them! This boredom can result in all kinds of hyperactivity, and often in destructive and even aggressive behavior.**

### Your domesticated wolf in a civilized society

You might think that you already do everything you can to satisfy your dog's most fundamental needs. You feed it, you give it water, you give it shelter - you take it to the vet when it is sick - all the TLC! So, your dog does not suffer!

I hope you are right - but the argument above does not suffice for the conclusion! There are many other needs that matter a lot for the dog - needs that are impossible for it to satisfy on its own! Here are some examples:

Meaningful social interaction with its pack? Is your dog getting enough of that? Most dogs need at least 6-8 hours of daily interaction with others...

Hunting excitement? What about all the behaviors connected to hunting: tracking, chasing, fighting, killing! Does your dog experience any of those?

Brain work? Are you challenging your dog to solve problems that are worthy problems for a dog to solve? Do you stimulate it to do nosework?

OK - OK - OK - I see all the objections...!

### Using training and play

First: Dogs can learn to be alone. It is not a natural thing for them. But learning that does take that the dog's social needs are generally satisfied - if not, you are in for a lot of trouble when you leave that dog alone!

6-8 hours of daily interaction is about the same *you* need to have with your family. It is not all about "partying" - but just the overall experience of "being together". Part of this time should be directly interactive. Half of it, probably. The rest can be "watching TV together" - which for the dog means "being in the same room".

Second: Hunting is a problem for most people. You cannot just let your dog run around in the forest chasing deer. But you could teach it to use its nose for tracking, following your foot's print to a piece of food at the end of the track. That would do the same thing, as far as instinct behavior goes. And it would be far more manageable.

Chasing - ball play is a super substitute. Dogs don't care what they chase - their instincts are open for learning to chase whatever is rewarded. Make it a ball or a Frisbee, and your dog is happy.

Fighting and Killing - don't be scared, you are not teaching your dog to be aggressive. Dogs do these things all the time when they play with each other. You just need to learn how to play with your dog - on the dog's terms, but with *your rules*! For the killing, you can use an old sock - they are good for tug-of-war games and for being "destroyed". And you can teach your dog to play-fight with you without its teeth ever touching your skin or your clothes!

### **Brain stimulation**

Dogs have a brain that needs to be used. A hunter, the dog has the capability of solving fairly complex problems - it is very open to constant learning. You need to make sure you always have some project going on that aims at teaching it *something new*. Retirement for a dog is mental death. Teaching your dog to use its nose, for instance for tracking or search, is a great way of satisfying many needs at the same time: nosework, hunting excitement, problem solving, learning new skills, interacting with you!

Also: do teach your dog to work on a problem on its own when you do not have enough time right now to attend to its needs. There are many ways of giving the dog meaningful tasks to do that both stimulates the brain and taps into several of the hunting instincts. Instead of letting your dog destroy things you value, you can wrap a treat into a cardboard box. Make some holes so the smell gets out - and let the dog "destroy" the box in order to get to the treat! Nobody gets killed, except the box - and the dog will have a great time. Once the dog "gets the hang of it", you can easily make it more difficult by use a Chinese box system with several boxes inside each other, and you can hide the box and let the dog search for it first. The possibilities are endless if you are willing to use a little imagination and keep an eye on the dog's fundamental instincts.

The key is that, instead of "natural triggers" for the instincts you cannot really manage directly, you can use imitations. As long as they can trigger the behavior, they will serve the purpose of keeping the need behind those behaviors down at a level that does not cause frustration - which means a mentally balanced dog in harmony with its family and environment.

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