

Greyhound Fact Sheet

Frequently Asked Questions - Behavioural enrichment

1. What is 'behavioural enrichment' and why is it important?

'Behavioural enrichment' or simply 'enrichment' is the provision of canine-specific physical and mental stimulation in a captive environment to encourage exhibiting normal behaviours, prevention of fear and stress, and enhance a greyhound's overall quality of life.

In addition to providing appropriate nutrition, health and shelter for a greyhound, social and mental stimulation are also important requirements in the keeping of greyhounds. Enrichment is an important tool in providing for their social and mental stimulation.

2. How can I provide enrichment to my greyhound/s?

Enrichment can be provided in a variety of ways and in combination, such as:

- I. *Feeding*: instead of feeding from a bowl, it may be more stimulating to provide food in a food-dispensing toy (see **Simple food-enrichment ideas** at end of article);
- II. *Sensory enrichment*: these may include spraying lavender or food scented air fresheners around the kennel, or playing radio or television in the background with a variety of sound, talk and noise;
- III. *Training*: train using positive reinforcement only and avoiding the use of punishment. An example would be rewarding the greyhound when it performs a desired action with a high-value reward (treats or toys). The more difficult the desired action, the higher-value the reward;
- IV. *Environmental*: such as exposure to a variety of surfaces (ramp, grass, cement, tile, pebbles), items (e.g. probe) and new environments in a positive space (e.g. positive reinforcement with a high-value reward). This is especially important during the socialization period (6 to 12 weeks old); and
- V. *Social*: exposure to a variety of people and other greyhounds from an early age in a positive space (e.g. positive reinforcement with a high-value reward).

3. What may develop with inadequate enrichment?

Inadequate enrichment may develop undesirable behaviors such as destructiveness, aggression, hyperactivity and self-trauma. It may also be difficult to train a greyhound to chase, as learning will be difficult when s/he is in such negative mental state.

These are examples of significant stress and mental health disorders which are conditions that are dangerous to the health or safety of the greyhound and cause suffering.

4. When should I refer to a dog trainer or a veterinarian with a special interest in behaviour?

A **dog trainer** has some basic understanding or knowledge in teaching greyhounds appropriate and desirable *normal* behaviours (e.g. chasing). Some trainers can also help with basic *normal but undesirable* behavior problems such as barking. Some trainers have formal training qualifications, but some do not. Therefore, "trainer" encompasses a wide variety of skill and knowledge, and there is no strict quality control.

A **Veterinary Behaviourist** is a professional who has completed their veterinary degree, and further education in animal behavior. They are normally sought when an abnormal behavior is identified (e.g. tail chasing or aggression). They are able to diagnose and provide a treatment plan which may include medication, to help manage the problem.

5. Is providing enrichment expensive and time-consuming?

On the contrary, enrichment doesn't have to be expensive nor time consuming. You can create toys from readily available household items such as towels, cardboard boxes and even freeze some treats and food. Some dogs may be more enthusiastic than others, and there is always a risk for accidental ingestion, so you should assess the risk-benefit of the individual dog.

Enrichment is not just limited to feeding but can also include playing music such as classical radio, providing new smell such as lavender spray, sight such as a change in scenery during walks or implementing other non-racing related training such as basic obedience. (See **Simple food-enrichment ideas at the end of this article**)

Once you are used to giving daily enrichment, removing items and cleaning becomes part of the routine just like cleaning food bowls.

Simple food-enrichment ideas

Enrichment does not have to be expensive nor time-consuming. Below are some examples of simple food-enrichment that you can employ:

1. Busy boxes:

Collect old boxes of various sizes and layer them inside one another. In each box, place tasty treats or kibbles so the greyhound has to find or shred the boxes to get to them.



2. Upside down boxes:

This is a modified enrichment with boxes. Using old boxes of various sizes, lay some food or treats on a clean floor then cover it with the box – with its opened surface over the food.

3. Muffin tin and balls:

Place some food (wet or dry) or treats in the muffin tray, then place a plastic or tennis ball over the hole.



4. Rolling towel:

Disperse dry food or treats into a bath towel as you roll it into a log shape.



5. Ice treats (for the summer):

You make use of plastic cups, sandwich bags, a milk carton or other containers dependent on your greyhound's preference. Place some kibble and/or treats into the container with water or broth and freeze until hard. Remove when needed and distribute to the dog to chew on the floor. *Note: Be mindful this may not be appropriate if your dog has bad oral health.*

