

Play includes a range of behaviours such as rolling over, pinning down, and biting. To interpret whether or not this is play, or one dog bullying the other, it's necessary to watch for reciprocal activity in the game (do they take turns playing 'top dog'), as well as both dogs' willingness to re-join the game if the activity is interrupted.





Not all dogs who are lying down are relaxed, although this dog clearly is. He is lying on his side, limbs outstretched, and head and tail in full contact with the ground. There is no tension in his body or facial muscles. The close-up of his face shows slightly narrowed eyes without any tension around them, and ears tilted slightly sideways.

face and a gambolling gait. However, dogs can express virtually every posture and behavioural sequence in their repertoire during a bout of play. A feature of play is that these stances and expressions are mixed into 'non-functional' sequences: ie they are not the complete behavioural sequence. For example, the dog may stalk, then run away, or chase, then roll over.

TOP TIP

To assess whether an apparently playful interaction is being enjoyed by all parties, check that roles are exchanged from time-to-time: eg all participants get a chance to chase the others. You should also note that, if the play is interrupted, all parties are keen to rejoin the game.

- **I am relaxed**

May be standing, sitting or lying down. Muscles visibly relaxed – mouth may be open or closed, but without tight muscle lines; ears may be swivelled sideways or drooping, and eyes not pulled wide or into narrow slits, so the muscles around them appear relaxed. The tail is in a resting position typical for the breed.

Note: Not all dogs who are lying down are relaxed – a relaxed laying position usually has the dog over on one hip, or even flat on his side. A tense position usually has him lying with his legs tucked under, and his face and muscles will show tension.

- **I am interested in this**

Weight forward – whether standing or sitting (often young dogs



8 There are lots of ways we can enjoy ourselves together

Most people choosing to acquire a dog have a general idea about the relationship they expect to share. Some specifically choose a dog to participate in a canine sport, such as agility, flyball or obedience, but many simply envisage a companion who can accompany them on long walks, or snuggle up on the sofa with them in front of the television. We often underestimate the wider potential of the relationship, and the fact that we can enjoy many facets of our dog's behaviour which we may not initially have considered.

Most dogs are highly adaptable and can learn to fit into our lives very successfully, but by engaging with them in specific activities that they enjoy, we can learn more about their view of the world, as well as deepen our relationship with them. You may discover new interests and hobbies by trying some of the wide range of activities that can help to meet your dog's needs.

REMEMBER!

Whatever activities you choose to do with your dog, they should be fun for both of you. If they're not, think about an alternative way of doing the activity (possibly with a different trainer), or try an alternative activity.

There are many training classes that you can attend to learn about specific dog-related activities, and, of course, there are many books and internet sites on the subject (see Appendix 3 for some suggestions), and plenty of toys and games you can buy. However, it is perfectly possible to have fun with your dog without spending a lot of money on any of these. This section will provide you with some ideas for fun activities which cover a range of abilities (both dog and human), and includes the use of bought and home-made toys and equipment. Obviously, make sure things are safe for you both first.

Additional benefits from engaging in a variety of indoor and outdoor games with your dog include –

Most people are aware of dog agility competitions; there are also many other dog sports, so it is usually possible to find one that suits both dog and owner.



HELPING MINDS MEET

For example –

- Is the surface underfoot sufficiently secure? Slipping can cause serious joint and back injuries for both people and dogs.
- Is the area perimeter sufficiently secure? Your dog may get excited and forget to pause at the roadside.
- Is it safe to engage in your proposed activity if other people or dogs are around? Other dogs may not like your dog running past them too quickly, and it is possible that thrown toys can spark conflict between dogs. Is your dog sociable and calm with other dogs, even if they get excited by what is going on?

If you want to explore some of these activities but are worried about the security of the environment, you may be able to find a local dog training or behaviour facility that has a secure paddock or hall that you can hire on an occasional or regular basis – it's certainly worth asking.

Here are some ideas for active games which can be played in your garden, out on walks, or in a secure open space.

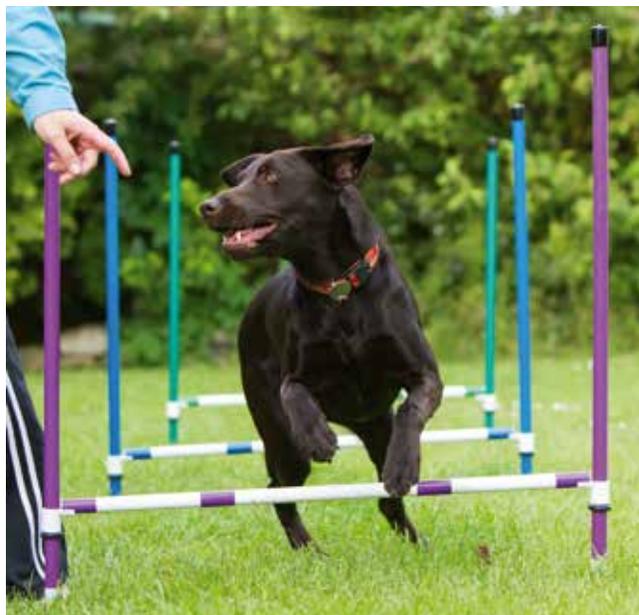
HOME AGILITY/OBSTACLE COURSES

You can buy a range of inexpensive agility equipment, or you can make it yourself – brooms and mops balanced on top of bricks, buckets or cardboard boxes can make obstacles for your dog to jump over; large cardboard boxes (placed open on the floor) can be ideal for him to sit inside until asked to move. Boxes with their bottoms opened up and placed on their side can form tunnels to crawl through.

A row of plastic bottles with sand in to weight them can form a line of objects to weave in and out of. You are limited only by your imagination and safety considerations, so watch some agility videos on the internet, and design your own fun course in your garden or hallway.

IMPORTANT PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Never make the obstacles so secure that they can't be knocked over by your dog– if a stick can be knocked off its support, it is less likely that a dog will trip or injure himself.
- To minimise injury risk make sure any stick ends that your dog could run on to are protected by something, such as an old ball with a slit in it.
- Always make obstacles very easy to begin with – for example,



You can buy inexpensive agility equipment to set up small agility courses in your garden.

Alternatively, a broom or mop balanced on bricks or books can create small jumps. Always ensure that they are safe to prevent injury.



There are lots of ways we can enjoy ourselves together



Above: A sturdy plank balanced on bricks or books can serve as a mini dog walk. By first using a food lure you can teach him to carefully balance as he walks over it. Exercises such as this can build his physical fitness and suppleness as well as his confidence. Do be sure that he doesn't focus on the treats in your hand so much that he doesn't look where he is putting his feet!



Even cardboard boxes can form part of a home-made agility course – he can be taught that when he gets to the box he should climb into it and sit inside.