

Let Them Run: Chasing Enrichment

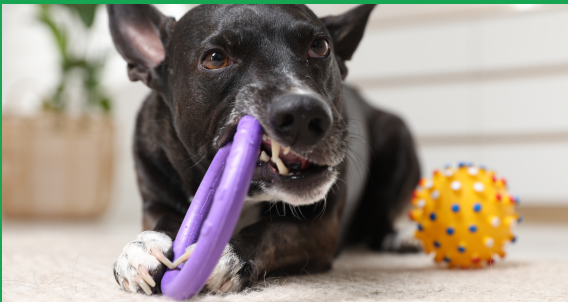


Why and how you can encourage your pup to chase!



Enrichment 101

At its simplest, enrichment is any activity that **enriches** your pup's life. The term comes from zoos: The same way ethical organizations provide animals with the chance to engage in natural behaviors, we can improve our domestic dogs' lives!



Honor your dog as...

- **A canine:** Think of deeply ingrained, ancient natural behaviors like chasing prey and scavenging for food.
- **A domestic dog:** We've selected different breeds to have specific traits. Many herding dogs have a strong desire to control the movements of those around them, for example, while many retrievers love to carry things in their mouths.
- **An individual:** You know your pup best. Just like people, dogs are unique! Keep your companion's history in mind — but don't be afraid to adjust to what they tell you in the moment, too.

Dogs have a natural instinct to chase



Domestic dogs **evolved from predators** who were hard-wired to track movement, chase, and catch prey.



Different dogs have different levels of “**prey drive,**” the desire to **chase fast-moving objects** like toys and critters. Some breeds are more prone to chasing than others.



It's most satisfying when your dog is ultimately **able to catch the thing** they're chasing. (Otherwise they can get frustrated.)



Creating opportunities for your dog to chase and catch—whether they run after a toy, another dog, or even you yourself!—can help **fulfill their instincts**.

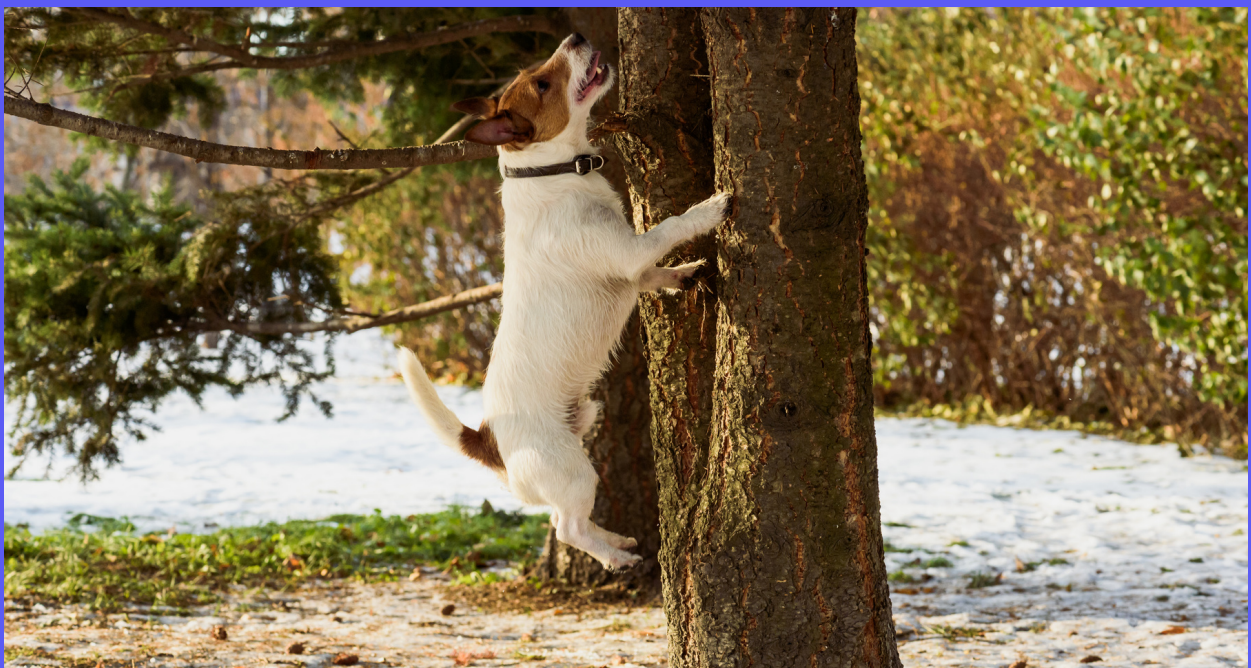
What's safe to chase?

- **Soft toys, especially those designed for it.** Flirt poles (like large cat toys with a soft tug on the end) can be perfect for closely controlled chasing games. Balls that are large enough your dog can't swallow them are popular, too. So are frisbees! AKC events like Fast CAT even use soft bags on a cable.
- **Other pets and people who are into the game.** Play-chase can fulfill dogs who are more physical. As long as all parties know it's a game—and no one feels overwhelmed—setting up these scenarios can be a great exercise and enrichment combo.



What's not safe to chase?

- **Wildlife.** Generally speaking, it's not a good idea to let our dogs chase after animals out on walks. We aren't in control of other critters' movement, so we don't know where they'll run—and domestic dogs can stress out sensitive wildlife.
- **Cars, bicycles, and other vehicles.** Some dogs have a strong desire to control the movement of wheeled objects. We can try to replace this urge with safer, controlled substitutes.



Avoid chasing games if...

- **Chasing might pose a safety concern.** Chasing enrichment usually involves your dog running and turning quickly. You should only play these games on dry, stable surfaces.
- **You're in a crowded place.** Areas with heavy foot traffic or limited space might not be the ideal chasing locations.
- **Your dog is elderly or injured.** Traditional fetch games can be tough on our pups' joints. Avoid high throws and sharp landings—and if your dog is slowing down? Slow the game down, too! You can always gently roll a favorite ball on the ground instead of tossing it.
- **Your dog struggles to stop chasing.** The healthiest games ebb and flow. Some dogs become highly aroused when chasing and can't calm down afterward.
- **Your dog's urge to chase is becoming excessive.** Satisfying your dog's desire to chase in safe ways can help them relax in other situations, because it makes them feel fulfilled! But if your dog becomes fixated on chasing and starts trying to run after things—like small critters or other people's toys—outside of your games, it might be time to talk with your trusted trainer or veterinarian for help.

Simple ways to chase safely

Run after each other in a **fenced-in environment**

Encourage your dog to chase after a favorite toy on a **no-slip surface** and bring it back to you

Set up **playdates with other dogs** your own pup knows and trusts—a lot of canine play involves taking turns chasing and being chased!

Chase after toys

Fetch is one of the most iconic dog games for good reason. When done well, chasing toys can emulate your pup's natural predatory sequence.



You can try...

- **Traditional fetch:** Toss a ball, frisbee, or other toy. Encourage your dog to bring it back. Bonus: Practicing this game can actually build cooperation skills between you and your pup!
- **Flirt pole:** A flirt pole looks like a large cat toy. You can move the handle to jiggle the toy on the end, running it just above the ground in circles for your dog to follow. This is an ideal option for smaller spaces!
- **Dog sports:** Dog sports like Fast CAT and Lure Coursing capitalize on our pups' chasing instincts. Fast CAT is very beginner friendly!

Play with other dogs

When dogs play together, they spend a lot of time chasing. Healthy, fair play should look pretty even: Both dogs will take turns “being the rabbit” and “being the wolf.” They’ll switch roles regularly.

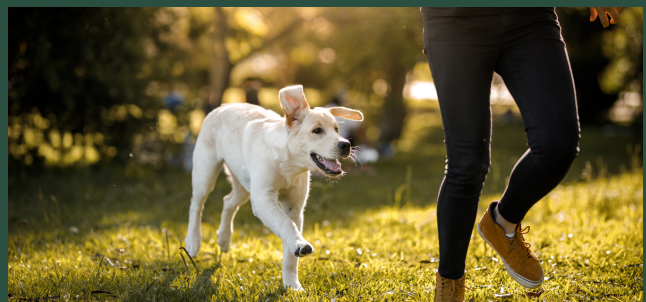
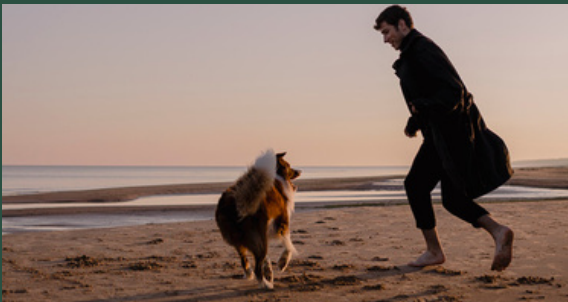


You can try...

- **Hosting playdates:** Invite a dog your own pup gets along with to your house, or—even better—a neutral space like a park or private Sniffspot. Meeting on neutral ground can help reduce the risk of territorial behavior and set the stage for comfortable play!
- **Attending a social hour hosted by a trainer:** Many professional dog trainers host playdates or “dog social hours” at their facilities. This can be a great way to let your dog experiment with play-chase games in a safe, supervised setting. If you aren’t sure your dog’s chasing is healthy or truly playful? A trainer can help you tell!

Chase each other

Some dogs love playing chase with their people, too! As long as you and your pup both know it's just a game, chase can be a great way to exercise and bond.



You can try...

- **Loose, playful movements:** Across the animal kingdom, quick and wiggly movements mean “play.” Make sure to loosen up and act a little silly yourself to get your pup into the game.
- **Using a “start” and “stop” cue:** Some guardians are (rightfully) worried that if they play too much chase with their dog, their pup will think it's **always** a game... and run away when they aren't supposed to. You can mitigate this risk by using a “start” and “stop” cue to let your dog know it's time to play. (Verbal cues like “ready” and “enough” work well.) Teaching a strong recall—and rewarding your dog for coming when called—can help, too!

Frequently asked questions



How can I get my dog to stop chasing when it isn't a good time? Consider teaching them one cue that means “go ahead” and another that means “that’s enough.”



Will chasing toys make my dog chase more prey, too? When done thoughtfully—so your dog knows there’s a time and place—designated chasing outlets can actually fulfill your pup’s instincts so they feel less pent up.



My dog is too old or injured to run quickly. What can I do? Modify chasing games to be lower speed and lower impact! Have your dog sit still while you throw a toy, for example, or play search games instead.



My dog isn't interested in chasing, actually. What gives? Every dog is different. Some pups prefer other forms of enrichment even more! (Breed can have some influence on this.) If your dog isn't a big chaser, they might like tug, sniff walks, or other activities instead.

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