

KONG Toys and Mental Stimulation in the Home for Adopted Dogs

“Toys are a basic necessity for mental health.”

Shannon Wells January 6, 2016

- Mentally stimulating toys/puzzles keeps the animal **independent** and reduces frustration for the owner.
- Enrichment plays an important role for the animals in our care because it activates a primal part of the brain that when engaged **reduces arousal, frustration and fear**.
- Dogs have seven emotional systems, based on specific neural systems that have been identified: **Seeking**, Rage, Fear, Lust, Care, Panic and Play. These emotional systems are rooted in deep sub-cortical areas in the brain, in other words, in the more primitive areas of the brain that are very similar across all mammals. Kongs/puzzles satisfy the **seeking system**. When satisfied, the dog has **reduced arousal, frustration and fear**.
- What makes dogs deteriorate in the shelter? **Arousal, frustration and fear**.
- What makes dogs deteriorate in the home? **Arousal, frustration and fear**.
- “They’re more than just toys.”
- Experts in the field of dog behavior who lead separation anxiety programs don’t let owners leave/adopt dogs without a plan for mental stimulation. Kongs/puzzles don’t necessarily fix issues like separation anxiety or arousal, but they *lay a foundation* for the dog to be in the right frame of mind to work through these issues.
- Sometimes, destructive behaviors are misinterpreted as separation anxiety when they are really from **boredom**.
- Feral/wild dogs spend their days looking for food or trying to reproduce: these activities are their **purpose**. Adopted dogs/domesticated dogs lead sedentary lifestyles where they have no jobs, so we must give them purpose.
- When used in conjunction with exercise, Kongs/puzzles give them a **job** in the home and a **purpose**.
- Black Kongs are for extreme chewers: they are more expensive, warranted, and more durable. Red Kongs are for average/moderate chewers.
- **Kong Wobbler:**
 - Sturdy and most effective at satisfying the **seeking system**.
 - Suggest to families that they not purchase a food bowl and instead give the meals out of the Wobbler. This allows them to turn meal time into an **activity** instead of scarfing down a meal.
 - Wobblers are also good for animals who eat too quickly or are at risk of bloat.
 - Some dogs are disinterested at first because they’ve never seen it before – do not be discouraged.
 - Dogs who eat out of the bowl before using a Wobbler (with treats instead of kibble, for example) may be disinterested because they are full. A food reinforcement is not as effective if the dog is already full. This is an added benefit of using it at meal time.
- **Kong Classic**
 - The classic is good for an **independent activity** in the crate and works in conjunction with the wobbler. It does not necessarily have to be a meal replacement.
 - There are a variety of ways to stuff a Kong but any ingredient needs to be used in **moderation** (ex: do not use strictly peanut butter or your dog will have diarrhea).
 - Coach the adopter on layering ingredients if possible: peanut butter, banana, yogurt, pumpkin, canned food, soft treat, etc – anything that is good for dogs.
 - Running the Kong under water once stuffed and freezing the Kong allows the ingredients to be firmer (frozen) and as a result, more challenging to finish. The adopter can stuff/layer, run under water, put in the freezer in a cup (to avoid dripping).
- Pull the toys when finished – having constant access to them lessens the reward (reinforcement) and can potentially be hazardous depending on what kind of chewer the dog is.

Diagram of a Well-Stuffed Kong Toy

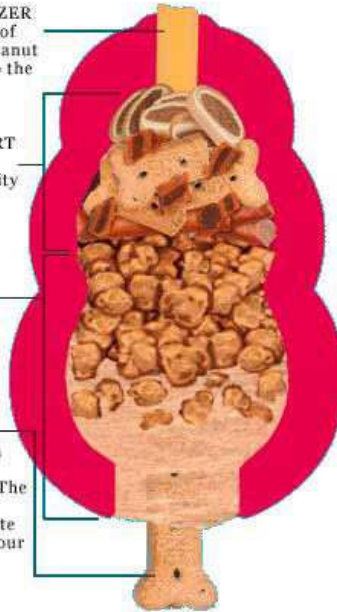
EXAMPLE - Step One: Start with a few clean Kong toys appropriately sized for the largest dog that could access them.
NOTE: Small breeds need medium Kongs for stuffing.

Step Two: TANTALIZER
Place a little morsel of freeze dried liver, peanut butter or cheese into the little hole on top.

Step Three: DESSERT
Fill approximately one-third of the cavity with doggie treats such as biscuits, marrow bites, etc.

Step Four: MAIN COURSE
Fill the last two-thirds with canned food or food roll mixed with kibble or food nuggets.

Step Five: APPETIZER
Leave a nice tidbit sticking out of the opening. The "easy pickins" will provide an immediate pay off and entice your dog to "get serious" about the job.



Banana Rama

Fresh banana

1 tablespoon plain yogurt (can use your pet's favorite as well)

In a bowl, mash up banana. Then add yogurt. Mash ingredients together and use spoon to add to Kong. Freeze for 4 hours.

Makes 1 serving for Medium Kong. (Double for every Kong size that is bigger.)

Cheesy Dental Kong Delight

(A very simple and creative way to make any pet drool in delight)

3 slices of your pet's favorite cheese

Just place the 3 slices of cheese directly onto the grooves of your pet's Dental Kong (if your model has rope - make sure cheese does not get onto it).

Melt in microwave for 20 to 30 seconds. Give to pet after it cools.

Philly Steak

Steak scraps

1 ounce cream cheese

Place small scraps of the steak inside Kong toy.

Spread cream cheese in large hole to hold scraps.

Frozen Jerky Pops

Peanut Butter
Bouillon
Jerky Strips
Water

Smear a small amount of peanut butter over small hole in our Kong toy. Fill the toy with cool water and add a pinch of bouillon. Place a jerky stick inside Kong toy and freeze. This also can be put (once frozen) in a children's size swimming pool for a fun day of fishing for your pet.

Simple, Tried and True

Peanut Butter

Smear peanut butter inside the cavity of your Kong toy. It's that easy!

or

Try mixing turkey, chicken, or marrow bites with slightly moistened food nuggets.

Freeze inside the Kong.

If you have an allergy-prone pup, use a canned-grain-free food (like Evo) and add to it:

- * *grated low-fat mozzarella weld it together - 15 seconds in the microwave*
- * *grated carrots*
- * *canned-pumpkin (freeze the Kong)*
- * *canned-fish - jack mackerel is good, inexpensive plus high in Omegas, as is water-pack sardines*
- * *frozen veggies: peas, diced-carrots, broccoli*
- * *ground turkey*
- * *dried cranberries, frozen blueberries...*
- * *low-fat cream-cheese - but CHECK for corn-starch!*

*Corn is one of the BIG BAD 3 - corn, wheat, soy - the 3 most-likely k9-allergens, in ANY form...
CORN-syrup, SOY-protein isolate, WHEAT gluten, etc.*

When freezing a Kong:

String-cheese cut in half length-wise makes a stubby popsicle-stick stuck it in the middle, and the dog has to work on the cheese to make an opening to get to the rest - a carrot-stick can serve, too.

I usually try to add no more than 1/3 the volume of the food in the form of 'goodies' - avoids too-much change and possible gut-reactions, and too-many added calories as well.

I like using the dog's regular-diet as the basis, b/c we are then feeding part of a meal in a more natural form, licking, pulling etc. It means fewer add-on calories, more-activity per meal, and slower-eating - dogs who gulp increase their odds of bloat