

# Enrichment Games

for High-Energy Dogs



**Barbara Buchmayer**

Your step-by-step guide to dog training fun!

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for High-Energy Dogs

Barbara Buchmayer



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# Contents

## *Ready, set ... Game on!*

The rules of the game 4

1 Let's change your dog's life! 5

### LEVEL 1 GREEN GRASS GAMES 14

2 **Get on base** 16

3 **Run the bases** 26

4 Play ball or flirt? 38

5 Your superpower! 44

6 **Distraction action** 54

7 Let's get engaged: **Engagement game** 60

8 Squares can be cool: **Cone squares game** 74

9 Running in circles can move your dog ahead:  
**Cone circles game** 84

### LEVEL 2 BLUE SKY GAMES 96

10 The game your dog won't want to miss:  
**Flirt pole game** 98

11 A fast and furious game: **Squirrel on the loose** 108

12 Ramping up the fun: **Go fish game** 118

13 Ready to level up? **Level up game** 130

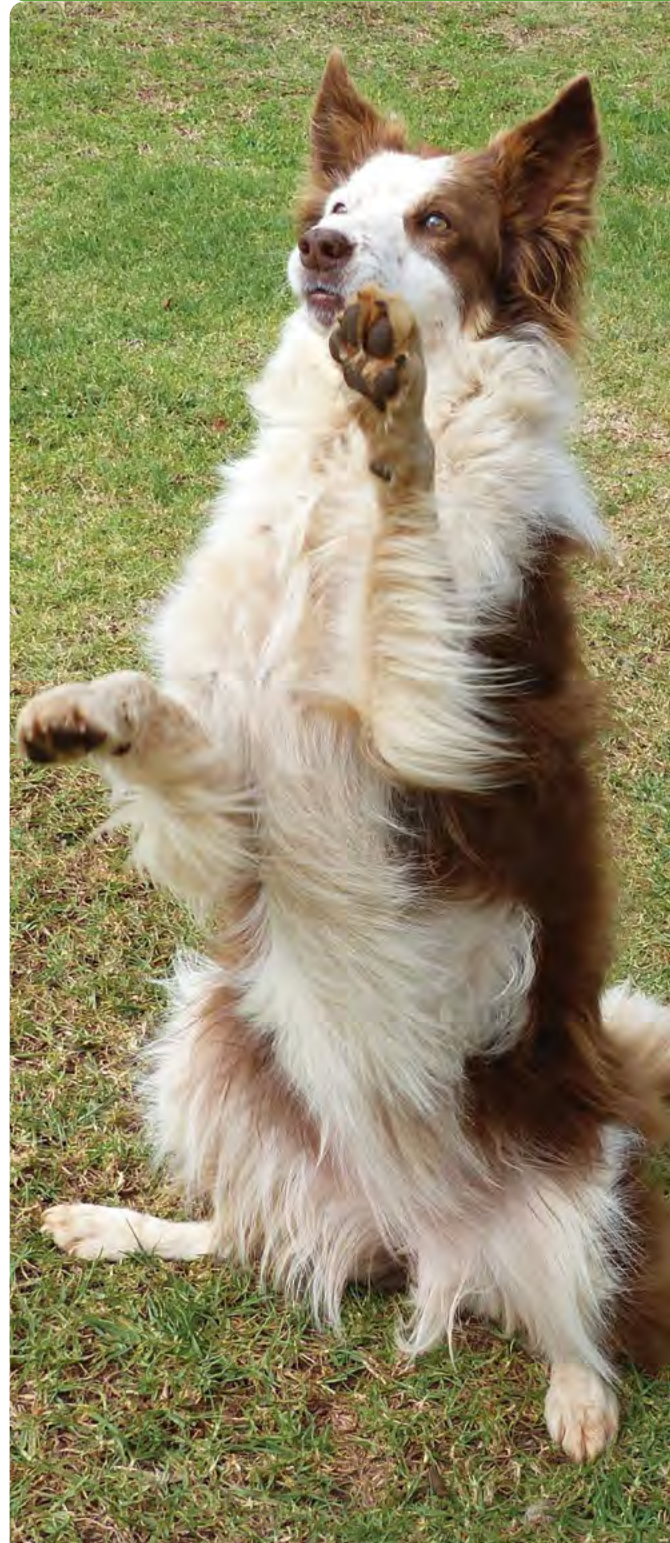
14 Blue sky and beyond: **Blue sky game** 144

Acknowledgments 155

About the author 157

Resources 158

Spread the word 159



# The rules of the game

## General rules



1. Fun first!
2. Give a cue only once.
3. Mark with a word or click, pause, and then reinforce with a treat or toy.
4. Break games into smaller steps when you or your dog struggles.
5. Keep game sessions short.
6. Safety always!



**To win:** Winning will be defined for each game.

**Level up:** How to level up for each game.



**Challenge:** (To be filled in later!)

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*More information on the rules is found in the following chapter.*

## CHAPTER 1

# Let's change your dog's life!

This is the book that you asked me to write, well not you exactly, but someone very much like you. Or maybe it was your dog, your high-energy dog.

Then again, maybe it was the gal who asked a question during one of my webinars. Let's call her Laura and her dog Sam, which are not their real names. "I have a dog", she began, "who is extremely distractable. He listens well in my house and is pretty good in any indoor setting, but ... as soon as we go outside he becomes totally distracted. Lose your mind distracted. He cannot sit or down, although he is proficient in doing both when inside. There is no way I could ever let him off-lead outside as I would have no hope of recalling him. I don't think he can even hear me in this situation, much less respond. What can I do?" she pleaded.



*Sir playing an advanced enrichment game.*

Since I faced a similar situation with one of my dogs many years ago, I knew just how desperate she was. Her question brought back gut-wrenching memories but it also made me realize that I could suggest a simple solution that most likely would work for her. The solution begins with a game, an enrichment game.

### **Your dog**

Before I tell you how I answered Laura's question, let's talk specifically about your dog, the Energizer Bunny dog, whose energy never seems to run down. You take your dog on a long walk or repeatedly throw a ball or Frisbee and they are ready for more. Let them run on a sandy beach or climb a steep mountain trail and they seem to grow stronger as your energy flags.

Let's face it, you are going to tire out long before your dog does. So how about presenting them with a challenging mental puzzle? Afterward, they may take a 5-minute nap, or not. What's a person to do?

Having lived with border collies for decades, I know what it is like to co-exist with high-energy dogs. Some days they get sufficient exercise and enrichment in their lives and some days not. Even with the best of intentions, it is difficult to provide the mental and physical stimulation that high-energy dogs need.

My dogs normally chill when inside, but I know that they would often love more activity in their days, even though they live on a farm and usually enjoy long walks daily. But a good walk or a run doesn't wear a dog out. Throwing a ball or toy for a dog to retrieve may take the edge off but may not be the best plan and usually doesn't provide significant mental exercise.

*Using a tug as the reinforcer for a cone game that starts simple but grows in complexity.*



Over the years, I have looked at mental exercises for dogs and canine enrichment activities, but most of them focus primarily on mental stimulation. Brain games are great, but dogs need to burn physical energy too. There just wasn't much out there that provided mental *and* physical enrichment for dogs, until now!

### The gap

While teaching basic dog-sport skills to my dogs, I serendipitously developed games that fill this mind/body exercise void. These are games that provide both mental and physical stimulation for your dog while simultaneously teaching essential skills. Could your dog benefit from increased self-control, sharpened listening skills, and a stronger bond with you? The best part is that as these games become more challenging for your dog, they become easier for you.



*Enrichment games can even be played inside, if you have enough room.*

After playing these games with my dogs for many years, I shared them with other owners of active dogs. They had just as much success playing these games with their dogs as I did with mine. In fact, they and their dogs had so much fun that people watching wanted to learn how to play the games too!

So what is it exactly that makes these games so attractive? Imagine simple games that are a challenge, mentally and physically for your dog, but easy for you. Your dog gets tons of physical and mental enrichment as they play the games while you are able to move as much or as little as you desire. Not just any old boring games, but exciting games that have your dog completely engaged with you as together you build a no-regrets relationship.

### Engagement versus Entertainment

Let's take a quick look at why you play enrichment games with your dog. Since most people don't make a distinction between an engaging activity and an entertaining one,



that's where we will start. There are two types of activities that have been labeled as enrichment, those that enrich while you engage with your dog and those that enrich without your engagement. You set up the puzzle or snuffle mat but your dog interacts with it alone. Both activities are useful in different situations.

Engagement activities are done with your dog and they stimulate your dog mentally and physically. They also build your relationship and the communication skills between you and your dog. Entertainment activities are played by your dog alone. They are good as a short-term diversion or for older dogs or dogs recovering from an injury.



*The difference between an entertainment activity and an engagement game is your level of participation.*

This book contains engagement games that you play with your dog. By playing these games with your dog you build listening skills, improve self-control, and foster a stronger relationship.

### **New, unique games**

*Enrichment Games for High-Energy Dogs* contains unique games that will transform your connection with your dog while providing tons of mental and physical exercise for your dog, but not so much for you. You can run and be active while playing these games or you can remain almost stationary.

Another great feature of these games is that you can easily match the level of the physical and mental challenge of the play to the degree of difficulty that is right for you and your dog. The games are easily modified as your and your dog's needs change day to day. The intensity of the play can also be quickly adapted to different dogs, changing physical needs, or the stages of a dog's life. These games are for all high-energy dogs, from youthful teens to seasoned golden oldies.

**These games are for you and your dog if:**

- Your dog loves to chase, run, or control movement.
- You want to mentally challenge your dog while you exercise their body.
- You want to build a stronger relationship with your dog.
- Your dog seems to have unlimited energy but you don't.

If you see yourself and your dog in the statements above, then these games are definitely for you!

**The real world**

There are also everyday advantages to playing enrichment games. Once your dog has learned the basic games, they will have acquired a level of self-control that will make your dog friends jealous!

The more you play these games, the more your dog will become tuned in to you and responsive to your cues. As you and your dog come together playing, your relationship will bloom. There is no better way to build an amazing relationship with your dog than by playing games together that are fun and captivating.

**The bottom line**

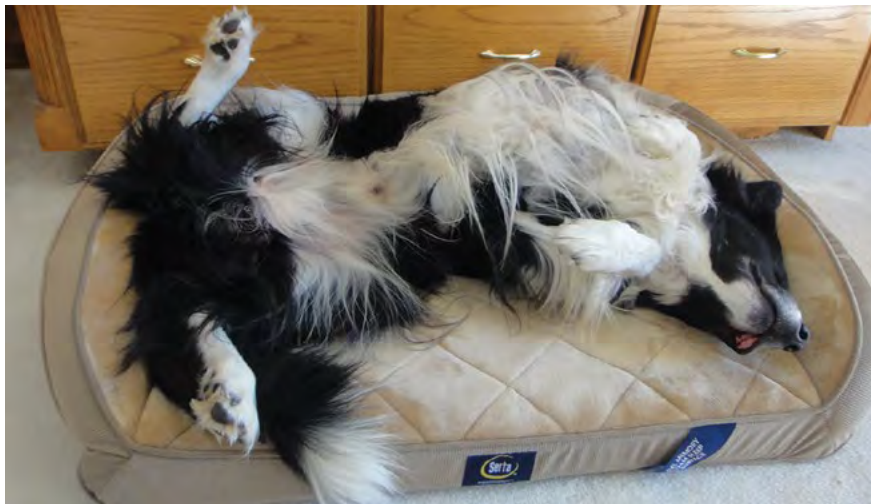
Let's jump to the bottom line. How are enrichment games different from other activities you do with your dog? First and most importantly, enrichment games are played primarily for the fun of playing. Period.

Second, dogs need to move and high-energy dogs not only need to move a lot, but they love to move fast. Throwing a ball or Frisbee may give your dog plenty of exercise, but this exercise can just be mindless chasing. Instead, these games provide quality mental and safe physical exercise for your dog.

**Safe enrichment**

Your high-energy dog must find ways to expend their energy. If you don't provide safe outlets for their excess energy, they will find other ways to burn their high-octane fuel. Left to their own devices, your dog may engage in behaviors that you may find undesirable or downright dangerous. If active dogs are confined to a house, crate, or small pen for extended periods, they may even injure or mutilate themselves.

*Gold relaxing while I work  
in my office.*



My dogs and I are happiest when they receive sufficient physical and mental stimulation every day. I see that their need for stimulation has been met when they happily nap or chill out while I putter around the house or work at my computer.

### **What are enrichment games?**

Enrichment games, as I define them, are fun activities that spark curiosity, present attainable mental challenges, and provide physical exercise. If the activity or game is thoughtfully structured, it also helps to build a great relationship.

The complexity of these games can be increased as your dog builds skills or you can keep the play simple. You craft the games for your and your dog's specific needs. You can play indoors or out, fast or slow, add more behaviors and elements or stick to the basics. The games are totally customizable and easily adaptable to changing situations.

### **Ready to play?**

Let's look at the training your dog needs to have mastered to successfully play these games. The skills your dog needs to have on cue are sit, down, and come. A retrieve will also come in very handy along the way. Most of the games can be adapted to treat tossing but a dog skilled at tugging will take to these games like a duck to water.

The beauty of these games is that they start simply and build from there. No fancy or expensive equipment is needed and a minimal amount of room. Since you will be exercising both your dog's mind and body, you won't need to play for extended periods, although your dog is not going to want to stop playing. Master a few enrichment games and you can look forward to a lifetime of enjoyment playing with your dog.

## Let's change your dog's life!

Enrichment games use a step-by-step framework that allows you and your dog to advance at a comfortable pace. Move forward when both you and your dog are ready for a new, slightly more challenging game. The games are designed to be fun and engaging at all levels, from beginner through advanced.

*Judy Albrecht Richmond and Ty playing a cone game.*



## Eleven enrichment games in a nutshell



### Green grass games – the six basic games

1. **Get on base** – Introduce your dog to the joy of seeking a home base.
2. **Run the bases** – Get your dog moving inside or out with a simple target game.
3. **Distraction action** – Challenge your dog to respond to simple cues while you ramp up the distractions. This game tests your dog's ability to respond when the environment and your actions get distracting.
4. **Engagement game** – Now you are going to raise the ante a bit. Can your dog respond to you when they are focused on something else? Can they respond to you when they are moving away from you and toward something they are focused on?
5. **Cone squares** – Add circling and other actions to the **Engagement** game. Your dog's speed of movement starts to ramp up in this game.
6. **Cone circles** – Expanding the size of your cone circle and adding exciting elements are the focus of this challenging game. Further challenge your dog by creating unique games using low jumps, targets, and more.

### Blue sky games – the five advanced games

7. **Flirt pole fun** – Learn the basics of handling and playing with a flirt pole. This is the game your dog won't want to miss!
8. **Squirrel on the loose** – Add the flirt pole to **Cone squares**. Simple but not easy.
9. **Go fish** – This game combines **Cone circles** with **Squirrel on the loose** for tons of fun. Add verbal cues, changes of direction, and a tape circle to keep your dog engaged with you as they play.

10. **Level up** – Level up by adding speed changes and moving into and back out of **Cone circles**. Increase the difficulty of play as your and your dog's skill sets soar.
11. **Blue sky** – The sky is the limit in this game. Any safe element you can imagine can be added to the **Cone circles** game. Think of two or three circles, tunnels, and figure 8s. The list is endless!

All of the enrichment games are mentally challenging for your dog. The physical challenges ramp up as the games move from your dog standing still to them moving at any safe speed that you desire, from a walk to a gallop.

### **Flirting with Sam**

I don't want to leave Laura, Sam, or you hanging. My suggestion for helping Sam with his inability to engage with Laura when outside was twofold. First, I suggested that she have Sam checked out by a vet behaviorist to make sure that there wasn't some underlying problem that caused him to be so distracted by the outdoor sights, sounds, smells, and movements. I doubted that was Sam's problem, but better safe than sorry.

My primary suggestion was for her to play an enrichment game with Sam – the **Cone circle** game. This game can be played with treats, tugs, balls, or a flirt pole, which is a flexible pole with a toy attached to the end by a string. Since Sam was very into tugging while inside, I suggested she introduce him to indoor flirt pole play. Using a small flirt pole would allow her to play in quite a small area.

Because a flirt pole toy can be made to appear to run and jump, the toy can mimic prey. Prey is the one thing that most dogs get super engaged with. Thus, it is a good bet that she could get Sam engaged inside her house. Then she could transfer that engagement to other rooms in her home, her screened porch, and then outside. Initially, she would need to play in a fenced area or have a leash or long line on Sam. Eventually, she may even be able to give Sam some freedom when outdoors!

### **Did it work?**

I can't tell you if my suggestion worked for Laura and Sam because we didn't stay in touch, but I want to make sure that your story has a happy ending by introducing you and your dog to some fun, stimulating games.

I can tell you that flirt pole play worked for me and my dog when I had the same situation that Laura is facing. Enrichment games can't solve every problem that your dog has but they can provide tons of mental and physical exercise for your dog while building a great relationship.

Welcome to *Enrichment Games for High-Energy Dogs*:  
*Your step-by-step guide to dog training fun!*

If you want to play amazingly fun games with your dog that provide cognitive, sensory, food, social, and physical enrichment, then this book is definitely for you.



*Let the games begin!*