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HOW TO RECOGNIZE A GOOD ACTIVITY FOR YOUR DOG

A guide for need-oriented, force-free anti-predation training (PST) including check list for your activities with your dog

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Most dogs with high prey drive are **active stress types**.

That means they not only need enough sleep to recharge their battery and relieve stress – they also need **movement** to run the stress out of their body.

However, all movement is not the same.

Find out what is a **good activity for your dog**, and what's better not to do (or only in small doses).

When you live with a high prey-drive dog, finding the right activities can feel like walking a tightrope: you want to give your dog meaningful outlets for their instincts, but without overstimulating them or making daily life harder.

This guide will help you understand what makes an activity good for your dog (and for you!) and which ones may look fun on the surface but actually push your dog into an unhealthy emotional state.

GOOD ACTIVITIES – WHAT TO LOOK FOR

1. Activities that fulfill *natural needs* without overstimulation

A good activity gives your dog a way to express instinctive behaviour in a controlled, balanced way.

This means: your dog's needs are met, but their arousal level stays within a healthy range.

For example:

- **Scent-based work** like searching for hidden treats or a target scent (e.g., vanilla, truffle oil) allows your dog to use their nose – the most powerful calming system they have.
- The focus and rhythm of sniffing help release dopamine and serotonin, the “feel good” hormones, without creating a hormonal high.

PST principle: Meet needs – don't feed the addiction.

Your goal isn't to switch off your dog's prey drive, but to channel it in ways that bring calm satisfaction instead of frantic excitement.

2. Physical activities that tire the body and mind in a senseful way

Dogs need movement — but not all movement is equal.

The best physical exercises balance body and mind rather than pushing the adrenaline system.

Examples:

- **Swimming** – gentle, rhythmic swimming without throwing sticks. It builds muscles, improves endurance, and has a calming, even meditative effect.
- **Trot** alongside the bike – at the dog’s own comfortable pace, not yours. The steady rhythm helps regulate breathing and heart rate.
- **Climbing** over logs, rocks, or low walls – encourages body awareness, coordination, and confidence.

These activities build resilience and self-regulation, not reactivity.

PST principle: Regulated movement → regulated mind.

And of course, there’s hardly anything better for your dog than **off-leash time**.

Free running allows your dog to move their body at their own pace and choose both direction and speed independently.

If off-leash isn’t possible where you live, look for safe areas where your dog can run free at least two to three times a week — fenced gardens, enclosed company lawns you’re allowed to use, or local dog clubs that might let you use their training field on non-training days in exchange for a small donation.

Be creative for your dog — it’s worth it!

3. Scent work with conscious recovery

Scent detection and mantrailing can be brilliant need-oriented outlets, but they also activate dopamine and adrenaline.

That’s why it’s essential to plan a **cooldown phase** after every session.

Try:

- Letting your dog lick for 30 seconds (e.g., from a LickiMat or treat tube)
- Scattering treats in the grass for quiet sniffing
- Slow, relaxed walking back to the car

This transition allows the stress hormones to drop and the calm, happy hormones (serotonin, oxytocin) to take over.

PST principle: Every high needs a low.

4. Activities that transfer positively to everyday life

A good activity supports your shared life, it doesn't make it harder. For example, games that build calm observation, loose-leash walking, or cooperative hunting behaviour help you enjoy peaceful walks.

Ask yourself:

“Does this game make my dog easier to live with – or harder?”

If it strengthens focus, connection, and self-regulation, it's probably a keeper.

5. Activities that suit your dog's genetic heritage

Knowing what your dog was originally bred for helps you choose wisely.

Examples:

- A **Beagle** finds satisfaction in following tracks → sausage water trails or target-scent tracking are great.
- A **Retriever** loves finding and bringing things → structured retrieving games, searching for hidden dummies.
- A **Pointer** enjoys stalking and pointing → controlled creeping games, exploration walks or the *Jump'n Run Game* to satisfy the need to orient in the environment .

If the activity fits your dog's natural strengths, it fulfills their needs *without* creating frustration or conflict.

PST principle: *Work with nature, not against it.*

✗ NOT SO HELPFUL ACTIVITIES – WHAT TO AVOID (AND WHY)

1. Repetitive fetching without cooldown

Throwing a ball again and again activates the most exciting parts of the predatory sequence: **chasing and grabbing**.

Each repetition floods your dog's brain with dopamine and adrenaline – the same mix that drives addiction.

When you suddenly stop without a cooldown, the hormones stay high, and your dog's system struggles to calm down.

This can lead to restlessness, frustration, and increased reactivity later on walks.

If you want to play fetch, that's fine. Just end the session with a cooldown:

- Scatter feeding in the grass
- Slow walking
- Extended licking time

PST principle: *Excitement isn't bad – imbalance is.*

A bit of thrill is the spice of life; it just needs recovery time.

2. Activities that constantly push arousal without resolution

Anything that repeatedly keeps your dog “on edge”, without letting the nervous system settle, can become emotionally unhealthy.

For example, running games that never end calmly, chasing toys at full speed, or overstimulating group play can all backfire.

These may look like “fun,” but in reality they often teach the dog to stay in a high-adrenaline state, which spills over into daily life.

3. Too much impulse control: the hidden stressor

Formal dog sports that involve long waiting periods and strict rules (e.g. obedience, IPO, agility competitions) can seem structured and useful – but they often drain your dog's impulse-control battery.

Your dog spends huge amounts of mental energy trying to *not move, not react, not express emotion*.

After such sessions, there's less self-control left for real-life triggers like wildlife, other dogs, or loud noises.

Especially stressful:

- When dogs must **watch other dogs working** while waiting.
- This creates extreme frustration: "I want to move, but I'm not allowed!"

Practical tip:

- Keep your dog in the car or a quiet corner until it's their turn.
- After the session, give a proper cooldown: sniffing, licking, quiet time, or shredding a paper bag.

PST principle: *Impulse control must be replenished – not exploited.*

4. Activities that ignore your dog's emotional needs

If your dog leaves a session more stressed than when they started, something's off. Even an "obedience success" means little if your dog's emotional balance suffers.

Ask yourself:

"How does my dog feel afterwards?"

"Calmer, more balanced, and connected – or tense, restless, and disconnected?"

A good activity builds your dog's confidence and peace of mind, not just their skills.

5. Think Before You Teach: Could This Skill Show Up Where You Don't Want It?

Be careful when teaching behaviours that have nothing to do with your dog's natural tendencies.

Dogs tend to generalize what they learn.

Especially in young dogs, where the brain easily absorbs new concepts and ideas, it's crucial to keep the focus on behaviours that will also serve you and your dog in daily life.

A dog who learns to track intensely for food or toys might later track wildlife with the same intensity.

Always ask yourself: "*Could this skill transfer to something I don't want in everyday life?*"

✦ FINAL THOUGHTS

Excitement isn't the enemy – *lack of recovery is.*

Joy, enthusiasm, and playful arousal are **vital parts** of a dog's emotional world. But every high needs a corresponding low – moments of calm, satisfaction, and safety.

The perfect activity:

- Meets your dog's natural needs
- Strengthens your bond
- Supports emotional balance
- Leaves both of you a little happier and more connected

That's what Predation Substitute Training® is all about: **helping your dog live out who they are**, in a way that brings peace instead of chaos.

How to use the downloadable checklist (decision aid)

Alongside this article, you'll receive a downloadable PDF with checkbox questions to help you decide whether a planned activity is a good fit for your dog. Here's how to use it:

1. **Fill it out for the activity you're considering.** Work through every question honestly and put either a ✓ (tick) or a ✗ (cross).
2. **Count your results.**
 - **More ✓ than ✗:** Great! This looks like a well-matched activity. Enjoy it and have fun together.
 - **Roughly equal ✓ and ✗:** Run a **trial** and observe whether the activity truly benefits your dog. Important: meaningful behaviour changes often show up only after **about 2–4 weeks**. So actually do the activity for that period and watch for shifts in your dog's **overall** behaviour – not just during walks or training, but also in everyday life at home (resting, settling, irritability, patience, connection, recovery). After **2–4 weeks, re-evaluate critically** using the checklist again.
 - **More ✗ than ✓:** Think carefully before doing this activity. If your dog has **no behavioural concerns at all**, is consistently **balanced, cheerful, and coping well** in daily life, you might still choose to include it **with close monitoring**. However, because many readers here are dealing with **excessive predatory behaviour** and often **co-existing issues** (e.g., **separation anxiety** or **reactivity toward dogs or humans**), treat a ✗-heavy result as a red flag: we'd **advise against** this activity and suggest choosing a different one that better supports your dog's needs.

In short: let the checklist guide you, **test thoughtfully**, observe your dog's **overall well-being over 2–4 weeks**, then **reassess and adjust**.