

Dog's Best Friend Activities



1. The 4-H member should feed the dog daily. The dog should not be “free fed”. The dog should only get food from the 4-H member. The 4-H member may want to “hand feed” the dog. This would mean that the dog would not eat their food out of a bowl, but the 4-H member would give each piece of food to the dog individually. The dog could be fed all at once, one-piece-at-a-time, or the dog could get its meal during games or training with the 4-H member. [If feeding from the hand seems “unsafe” or “too sloppy”, then the piece of food can be put in a light weight plastic container to be offered to the dog.] The dog may be more interested in “treats” if it is not fed a full ration of food the day it attends a weekly training class.
2. The 4-H member should be the one that gives the dog fresh water daily. The dog should *always* have fresh water available throughout the day.
3. The 4-H member should exercise the dog daily by taking it for walks on a leash and/or throwing a ball, toy, stick, Frisbee, etc. for the dog to chase (and return?).
4. The 4-H member should walk the dog on a leash for at least a short time each day. The dog needs to learn to walk on a loose leash (without pulling) on the left side of the handler. [Practice makes it easier for the dog (and 4-H member) to improve skills.]
5. “Attention” can be taught by rewarding eye-contact from the dog. The 4-H member should work towards being able to have the dog look towards them when the 4-H member says the dog’s name.
6. A fun game to practice an informal “come” is to have the parent hold the dog. The 4-H member moves across the room. The 4-H member calls the dog and gives it a reward or treat when it arrives. Then the 4-H member holds the dog, the parent calls the dog, and rewards it when it arrives. Gradually the parent and child can be in different rooms, different parts of the house, outdoors, or hiding. Sometimes this is called “doggie ping-pong”, because the dog is going back and forth between two people – and having a great time!
7. “Sit”, “down”, and “stay” can be practiced daily during inside or outside activities. The dog can “sit” or “down” to get a piece of its food. The dog can do “doggie push-ups” [sit, down, sit, down, sit, etc.] for a special game and/or treat. The dog can “stay” while the 4-H member gets a towel to wipe the dog’s feet, or “stay” while the 4-H member goes out the back door, before inviting the dog to come out also. They can play a “game” of “stay” while the 4-H member and other family members provide various distractions for increasingly longer periods of time.
8. Teaching and learning “tricks” can be a blast. A “clicker” is helpful to “mark” the behavior that gets the dog a treat. Simple things that the dog does like “sneeze, yawn, bark, bow, spin in a circle, rub nose, smile, scratch, etc. can be clicked and treated. The dog will then be more likely to repeat that behavior. After the dog is repeating the behavior, then the “command or cue” is added and the click and treat are only given for the behavior when the command or cue is given. Jump in a box, jump out of a box, jump on top of a box, push a box with their nose, pull a box with an attached rope or towel, carry a basket, play dead, roll over, balance things on nose, catch food or toy, beg, push a carriage, and ring the bell, are all fun tricks.
9. The 4-H member should groom their dog regularly. The 4-H member and dog become better friends if brushing, toe nail clipping, ear and teeth inspections, and baths are all part of their relationship.
10. Take the dog for rides in the car to places other than just the vet and 4-H dog class. Meeting with a friend and their dog at a park, school, church grounds, or pet store for a walk will help socialize the dog, and reduce the stress of the first 4-H Dog Club training classes.