

## Fun things to do with your blind-deaf dog

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It's easy for life to become the same old thing day after day for a dog that is blind and deaf. There is not the constant barrage of new sights and sounds to keep the dog interested and alert in the world around her. At my house, our mealtimes always get Treasure's attention with a new array of smells each time, but other than that, she will just find a quiet spot to lay and relax until something gets her attention. Her day can get pretty boring unless I provide her with things to get her attention.

It's important with any dog to offer it new and varied things to do each day. It keeps the dog's mind sharp and helps to keep her content. Exercise is important for a dog's physical body, but also for its mind. Here are some things that Treasure finds interesting and exciting. You might try some of these things to spice up your dog's day, too.

Treasure loves **food puzzles and toys!** I will often feed her meals in these toys. We have a dog brick puzzle, which she likes. She also likes her food ball and Kong wobbler toys. Other food toys include Kongs and other rubber toys designed to put food inside. They come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, each providing their own challenges to the dog to figure out how to get the food out! Varying which toy or puzzle we use allows Treasure to use different skills and problem solving each time. Be sure to keep other dogs away while the blind-deaf dog is playing with food toys. She won't be able to see another dog sneaking up to steal her food, and sometimes dogs can get possessive of toys and food. Better to prevent any issues from the beginning.



Treasure loves to check out new **smells!** One of her favorite finds was a teddy bear made out of alpaca wool! She buried her nose deep into the bear and breathed in deep, deep smells. She will take a long time to smell my shoes when I have gone somewhere new and exciting ... the farm show, the sheep pasture, etc. And I can introduce new smells to her from my spice and extract collection, or from any other source: an orange peel, rabbits, cats, etc.

Just rub a washcloth onto the animal or scent and then let your dog smell it. Be careful if your dog eats washcloths!! Treasure enjoys the new smells but would eat a clump of sheep wool or an orange peel, so transferring the smell to something different first works for her. Be aware that the dog's sense of smell is very developed. Don't just shove a new scent into the dog's

face. Place the scent near her for her to discover on her own. That way she can get as close to it as she chooses in her own time without being overwhelmed.

Treasure enjoys checking out new **surfaces**: fleece, gravel, grass, fake grass, metal, bubble wrap, surfaces that are bumpy or wobbly, tunnels, wood chips, sand, the wading pool with a bit of water in it, etc. Each of these give her new tactile information and she will wander off and onto the new surface over and over again as if comparing it to the normal surface. Don't force the dog onto a new surface. Place the dog near the surface and let her explore. You can put a few treats onto the new surface to create a trail for the dog to follow, but let it be her idea. No forcing. This is supposed to be fun for your dog!

Treasure enjoys the air conditioning vent and the air blowing from fans. Be sure that you have safety in mind! A blind dog cannot see where the fan and cords are to avoid them and may knock the fan down on top of herself! One idea is to put the fan behind a gate or pen so she can still feel the air but not get right up to the fan. Also think that an oscillating fan feels different than a still fan. Try both and see which your dog prefers.

Treasure loves to go to **new places** and meet new people. Think of all the new smells and sensations of going out some place new! A smaller dog like Treasure can ride in a stroller or wagon, or can even be carried. Take your dog on walks. Go to a new park and let your dog safely explore on a long leash or in an ex pen with you supervising. Take your dog on car rides to run short errands. All of these involve your dog being able to smell new smells and experience new sensations.

Teach your dog new **tricks and games** to play. Dogs enjoy learning new things when we keep it fun and reward them often. How can you adapt activities and tricks that you see other dogs doing so that it is safe and fun for your dog?

We have a big toy box at my house. I always rotate which **toys and bones** are available to the dogs. This keeps their interest. It's like putting some of a child's unwanted toys into the closet for a rainy day. When you get them back out, it's like they are new all over again!



A blind-deaf dog's world is full of smells and tactile information. Taking special time every day to sit and **touch** your dog will do more than give you a special time together. Touch may be calming to you both and offers your dog's nervous system important input. Petting or stroking with love and intention will do you both good! If you know how, adding Healing Touch for Animals®, Tellington TTouch®, massage or other body work will also be beneficial for your dog's well-being.

If these activities are new to your dog, she may not respond to them right away, or she may even avoid them in the beginning. That's ok. Dogs have preferences just like we do, and that activity may not be the right one for your dog. But, also be aware that dogs often try to avoid something new that they don't understand. It may be that with repeated exposure, your dog starts to experiment with some of the activities that it previously didn't pay any attention to.

Give your dog something new to discover and do several times a week. You may be surprised at her reactions!

***Debbie Bauer** is a certified Healing Touch for Animals® practitioner, a certified Tellington TTouch® practitioner, a published author, and a professional dog trainer. She has over 28 years of training and consulting experience working with dogs and their people. She specializes in working with dogs that display fearful, reactive and aggressive behaviors, in a positive manner. Debbie has trained dogs in a variety of fields including therapy and assistance dogs, print ad and media work, obedience, agility, and scent work. One of her passions is working with and educating about deaf, blind, and blind/deaf dogs.*