

# Pets Love This More Than Almost Anything and It's Terrific for You Too

Doing these six things with your dog can make it one of the richest and most rewarding relationships on earth, similar to this prized one between humans. Except that in many ways, it is qualitatively different from the world of people and can literally be transformative.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Research shows the bond between a person and a dog is similar to the bond experienced between an infant and his parents
- Taking steps to strengthen your bond with your dog will only add to the enjoyment and closeness you experience when in each other's presence
- Obedience training, trick training and nose work are examples of activities that may increase your bond with your dog
- Engaging in a sport with your dog, such as flyball or agility training, will also facilitate bonding
- One of the most powerful ways to bond with your dog is also one of the simplest: making eye contact

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published September 16, 2016.***

For many pets and their owners, bonding comes naturally as you cuddle together on the couch or go for your daily morning walks. The bond you feel with your dog may be indescribably strong, and add a sense of comfort and companionship to your daily life that you couldn't imagine living without.

In fact, research shows the bond between a person and a dog is similar to the bond experienced between an infant and his parents.<sup>1</sup>

In her book, "Pack of Two," author Caroline Knapp eloquently described the sometimes-surreal experience of bonding with a dog — it is the essence of why so many of us open our homes, and our hearts, to these animals:<sup>2</sup>

*"Before you get a dog, you can't quite imagine what living with one might be like; afterward, you can't imagine living any other way ...*

*I once heard a woman who'd lost her dog say that she felt as though a color were suddenly missing from her world: the dog had introduced to her field of vision some previously unavailable hue, and without the dog, that color was gone.*

*That seemed to capture the experience of loving a dog with eminent simplicity. I'd amend it only slightly and say that if we are open to what they have to give us, dogs can introduce us to several colors, with names like wildness and nurturance and trust and joy.*

*... I also believe that dogs can — and often do — lead us into a world that is qualitatively different from the world of people, a place that can transform us.*

*Fall in love with a dog, and in many ways you enter a new orbit, a universe that features not just new colors but new rituals, new rules, a new way of experiencing attachment.”*

## How to Strengthen Your Bond with Your Dog

Whether you've just recently added a new dog to your family or you and your dog have been together for many years, it never hurts to work on your relationship.

Taking steps to strengthen your bond with your dog (even if you feel it's strong already) will only add to the enjoyment and closeness you experience when in each other's presence. Ideas include:<sup>3</sup>

1. **Obedience training** — This is important not only to teach your dog basic commands like “sit” and “stay,” but also to teach you how to communicate with your dog. You can start positive-reinforcement obedience training when your dog is a puppy and continue on from there, exploring different types of training together.

For instance, if you've already mastered clicker training with your dog, you could try out the **Do As I Do**, or DAID, method, which uses social learning to teach dogs new behaviors.

2. **Trick training** — After obedience training, you can move on to teaching your dog how to do tricks, like shaking hands or jumping through a hoop. Many dogs enjoy being mentally stimulated in this manner, and many owners enjoy working with their dogs to teach them clever tricks.
3. **Hiking** — Taking a hike together in a natural environment is a treat for both of you. You'll bond easily with your dog as you both take in the sights, sounds, scents and fresh air while out on a nature trail. Not to mention, it's great exercise for dog and owner alike.
4. **Agility training** — Agility training is a sport you can do with your dog, either just for fun or competitively. You'll teach your dog how to run through agility courses filled with various obstacles, like tunnels, teeter-totters and weaving around poles.

Dogs that enjoy agility training will reap great mental and physical rewards, and you and your dog will quickly grow closer as you work through the courses together.

If you're new to agility training, you can see one example in the video below and, if you want to give it a try, can find an **agility club here**.

5. **Flyball** — Flyball is another sport you can learn with your dog. It involves two teams of four dogs each who run, relay-style, down the jumps to trigger a flyball box, then retrieve the ball and return over the jumps.

When the previous dog returns, the next dog is released to run the course. The first team to have all four dogs finish the course without errors wins.

In the U.S. and Canada, there are more than 375 flyball clubs registered with the North American Flyball Association. You can **[find a flyball team for you and your dog here](#)**.

6. **Nose work** — Another recreational or competitive activity you can do with your dog is **nose work**, which, at the competitive level, was created and sanctioned by the National Association of Canine Scent Work (NACSW). Nose work training teaches your dog to find one of three scents, wherever you decide to hide it. In nose work competitions, there are four locations involved in searching: interiors, exteriors, containers and vehicles.

You can also do nose work on your own by hiding some bits of food in a few boxes and letting your dog figure out which one contains the treat. Then, take the game outdoors and let him search for food, clothing, items or you, using his nose as his guide.

If you really want to see your dog's tracking potential, and learn how to engage in tracking games with your dog, consult a local trainer or tracking club. Find a **[local "nose work" trainer here](#)**.

## Another Way to Bond with Your Dog? Gaze Into His Eyes

One of the most powerful ways to bond with your dog is also one of the simplest: making eye contact. When you and your dog look into each other's eyes, it triggers an increase in levels of oxytocin, aka the love hormone.

Oxytocin plays a major role in bonding among humans and, it turns out, its effects may transcend to different species. Specifically, oxytocin reduces stress responses and anxiety while increasing feelings of trust, relaxation and bonding. So the next time you want to connect with your dog, simply look into his eyes.

### Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [PLOS One, May 29, 2013](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The New York Times, Books, Pack of Two](#)

<sup>3</sup> [VetStreet, July 13, 2016](#)

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