


# What's a Dog to Do?

 [thinking.dog/2020/04/20/whats-a-dog-to-do](https://thinking.dog/2020/04/20/whats-a-dog-to-do)

Pam Hogle

April 20, 2020

**By Deni Elliott**

Weeks of sheltering in place have taken their toll. Even our dogs have gotten bored with the stale smells in the same circuit of empty sidewalks that they've walked morning, noon, and night, day after day. We're all looking for ways to amuse our canine companions, including people, like me, who are visually impaired and partner with guide dogs.



Guide dogs are used to as much socialization and stimulation as their human partners normally have, and they can't have Zoom happy-hours to compensate. Pre-virus, guide dogs' daily lives were filled with work: leading their people to the office, going to meetings, running errands at lunch, meeting friends for dinner or going to the theater at the end of the day. Now they are as likely as their previously active human partners to be climbing the walls. They grumble and sigh, "When are we going to DO something? When are we going to GO somewhere?"

People paired with guide dogs know that we need to go out for regular walks on harness to keep our dogs' guiding skills sharp. But that still leaves a large part of every day. Here are some suggestions from Guiding Eyes for the Blind grads that would engage any inquisitive canine who has a basic obedience repertoire:

- "Hide-and-seek" is an easy game for a start. Leave the dog on a sit-stay in one room, go into another, and call your dog. Have a treat ready for when your dog finds you. Take your friend back to the starting place and repeat. You can get progressively tricky by hiding behind the couch or drapes or crouching down next to the bed. If you want to teach a new recall skill, introduce a dog whistle, clicker, or simply clap your hands.

- Deborah Groeber, a retired attorney, adds a level of difficulty with “Find it.” She shows her guide, Iris, a favorite toy, then leaves the dog on a sit-stay while she hides the toy in another room. Deborah returns and tells Iris to “find it.” The dog seeks out the toy and returns it in exchange for a treat. The work for Iris gets progressively harder as she hunts the toy down in places she is not likely to look, such as behind the shower curtain or in the corner of a bookcase. But the last “find it” is purposely easy so that the game ends with Iris feeling successful.
- Victoria Keatting, a massage therapist and member of the Guiding Eyes for the Blind Graduate Council, is using her extra time to teach guide dog Watson to solve interactive puzzles, which she bought from Chewy.com. Treats are hidden in compartments that the dog can reach only by manipulating levers or spinning disks with his nose or paws. Once Watson understood that the treats Victoria placed didn’t fall through for him to retrieve underneath the puzzle, he enjoyed the dexterity practice.
- Some of us are using our time at home to have our dogs help out with the daily chores. At our house, Golden Retriever Cali fetches the morning paper, and Guiding Eyes Koala deposits the dogs’ food bowls, after meals, into waiting human hands for washing. Both dogs are supposed to put their toys in the toy basket before bed, but that’s most likely to be enforced only after a human gets startled by tripping over a squeaky toy. (Watch Koala stack the food bowls.)
- As even the best of friends can sometimes seem underfoot, author Peter Altschul sends guide dog Heath off for a weekly playdate with a friend’s dog. Unlike the concern raised if neighborhood children play together, there is no worry that an exhausted dog will bring home COVID-19.

Unlimited snuggling, petting, additional pampering, and connection create the silver lining that our dogs enjoy as we shelter at home. But every household has its boundaries. At our house, dogs are allowed only to watch our morning yoga routine. They no doubt privately laugh at the funny human tricks. But no canines are permitted on the mats. Following the internet instructor is enough for the people to handle before coffee without dog feet, tails, and happy tongues complicating our poses.