

Printable guide

10 Zero-Cost Indoor Dog Games

A starter guide for calm sniffing, focus, and low-equipment enrichment at home.

Start with household items, short sessions, and clear safety limits before buying puzzle toys or a full course.

How to use this guide

- Pick one easy game, use part of a meal or a few treats, and stop while your dog can still make calm choices.
- Put food toys, towels, cups, and household props away after the game.
- Skip food games when dogs compete, guard food, or swallow unsafe objects.

Safety boundary: This guide is for low-risk foundation games. If there is bite history, severe fear, sudden behavior change, or unsafe handling, start with a veterinary exam and qualified in-person guidance.

Full steps and links

Open the online guide for links to each full game page:

<https://doggamefinder.com/resources/indoor-dog-games/>

1. Treasure Hunt

Goal: Build calm sniffing and confidence with hidden treats in one room.

Use: Treats or meal pieces, plus three easy hiding places.

Try: Let your dog watch the first hide, release them to search, then make the next round only slightly harder.

Track: Your dog searches without frantic pacing and can disengage after the last find.

Skip if: Skip if there is resource guarding around food or multiple dogs competing for treats.

2. Snuffle Scatter

Goal: Turn part of a meal into slow sniffing work instead of bowl gulping.

Use: Kibble or dry treats scattered in a towel, mat, or safe patch of floor.

Try: Start with visible food, then fold one towel edge over a few pieces when your dog understands the game.

Track: Sniffing stays steady and the towel is not being shredded or swallowed.

Skip if: Skip for dogs who swallow fabric, guard food, or get tense when people approach meals.

3. Muffin Tin Search

Goal: Introduce simple puzzle solving without buying a puzzle toy first.

Use: A muffin tin, a few treats, and tennis balls or crumpled paper cups.

Try: Put treats in two cups, cover only one at first, then cover more cups as your dog learns the pattern.

Track: Your dog uses nose and paws gently instead of flipping the tray hard.

Skip if: Skip if your dog mouths or swallows balls, paper, or silicone cups.

4. Shell Game

Goal: Practice focus and scent work with cups you already have.

Use: Three sturdy cups and one treat.

Try: Hide the treat under one cup, ask for a calm wait, then let your dog choose. Keep early rounds obvious.

Track: Your dog can pause before choosing and does not crush or carry off the cups.

Skip if: Skip if cups become chew objects or your dog gets frustrated quickly.

5. Eye Contact Reset

Goal: Create a tiny focus break before doors, meals, walks, or play.

Use: A few small treats and a quiet room.

Try: Say your marker word when your dog glances at you, reward, then slowly add one second of duration.

Track: The dog offers eye contact without jumping, barking, or crowding the hand.

Skip if: Skip long stare contests; keep it light for worried or conflict-sensitive dogs.

6. Hand Target

Goal: Teach an easy redirect cue for moving your dog without grabbing the collar.

Use: Your hand and a few treats.

Try: Present a flat hand near the nose. Mark and reward any nose touch, then add one step of movement.

Track: The touch is soft and repeatable, and your dog follows willingly.

Skip if: Skip if the dog is fearful of hands near the face or has a bite history.

7. Airplane Delivery

Goal: Slow down treat delivery and help excited dogs notice your hand calmly.

Use: Small treats held in a closed fist.

Try: Move the treat slowly toward your dog. If jumping starts, lift the hand away and reset before trying again.

Track: Your dog waits with four feet down before the treat arrives.

Skip if: Skip if hand feeding creates hard mouthing or unsafe grabbing.

8. Treat Countdown

Goal: Build a predictable end to short training sessions.

Use: Five treats counted out where you can see them.

Try: Do one easy cue per treat, count down calmly, then say all done and put the treats away.

Track: Your dog can stop after the last treat without frantic searching.

Skip if: Skip if the visible treats trigger guarding, grabbing, or loss of control.

9. Open Sesame

Goal: Practice impulse control around a door, crate, or baby gate without rushing.

Use: A low-distraction doorway or gate.

Try: Open the door a crack when your dog is calm. Close it gently if rushing starts, then try a smaller opening.

Track: The dog can pause while the opening grows a little wider.

Skip if: Skip busy exterior doors, unsafe escapes, or dogs who panic around barriers.

10. Name Recognition

Goal: Refresh the habit of turning toward you when their name predicts something good.

Use: A quiet room and small rewards.

Try: Say the name once, mark the head turn, reward, then move to a different spot and repeat.

Track: Your dog turns after one name cue without you repeating it louder.

Skip if: Skip using the name to scold; that weakens the cue fast.

Next step: If your dog settles well with these games, compare free games, puzzle toys, a structured course, and in-person help in the Dog Game Finder path guides.