

# Sniff Lick Chew: 3 Ways To Calm An Anxious Dog

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November 4, 2021

Dogs are creatures of habit; new routines, people, noises, smells and environments can make our furry friends uncomfortable.

There are lots of ways to calm an anxious dog – making sure they're getting the right amount of exercise is one (this is different for each dog), and soothing affection in the form of strokes and cuddles is another – but a really effective method that is often overlooked is enrichment activities. This is where the anxiety-busting trifecta 'sniff lick chew' comes into play.

All dogs can become anxious, and some things will upset one dog more than another. Keep a close eye on your pup throughout this time and put some 'sniff lick chew' measures in place to soothe them and keep them calm if it all gets too much. 'Sniff lick chew' is a form of enrichment that encourages dogs to embrace their canine instincts and put their clever brains to work. These natural behaviours will soothe your dog and keep them occupied.

Keep reading to find out more about 'sniff lick chew' and what you can do to encourage these natural, stress-relieving canine activities.

## 1. Sniff

Your dog's nose is one of their biggest distractions. Remember all the times you've been walking along quite happily, lead in hand, and you're suddenly yanked off your feet because your dog has caught a whiff of something interesting. Think about your dog in that moment: they are focussed and content, completely distracted from anything going on around them.

Sniffing activates a part of your dog's brain that releases the feel-good chemical dopamine which helps to stabilise any anxious feelings they might have. It's a highly effective self-soothing mechanism. Pretty clever, huh?

If you can sense that your dog is feeling anxious, try to distract and relax them by providing the opportunity to sniff. Here are some suggestions for how you can do this:

- Hide treats around your house or garden and let your dog seek them out with their powerful nose.
- Make dinnertime more engaging with a snuffle mat. Scatter your dog's biscuits across the mat and let them enjoy a good old 'snuffle'. A dog's natural instinct is to forage, so this will keep them happily occupied. A DIY alternative to a snuffle mat is a box filled with scrunched up paper (opt for dog-friendly paper if you can).
- Place your dog's food in a puzzle feeder or kong. Your pup will have to use their nose and problem-solving skills to enjoy their meal. This is a great

way to extend meal time, keeping your dog distracted and mentally engaged for longer.

- Play fetch, but encourage your dog to use their nose instead of their eyes. You can do this by telling your dog to sit or stay until the toy or ball has landed. Then give the 'find' command, and watch your dog eagerly sniff out their toy.

## 2. Lick

Licking is another natural canine behaviour that releases feel-good chemicals and calms our furry friends down. Think of it as being a bit like a nice massage. Things that cause dogs stress such as loud noises, environmental changes, or separation anxiety may encourage them to start licking more than usual, and they'll do so instinctually.

While licking is a natural form of self-therapy for many dogs, it helps if we encourage them to lick when we know they are feeling stressed.

Here are some great ways to encourage healthy licking behaviour:

- Use a lick mat to turn feeding time into a lickathon! Lick mats are usually made of rubber with interesting, patterned grooves on the surface where you can stick different types of soft or solid food. It might not look very calming when you see your dog frantically trying to lick their food out of the mat, but the challenge will focus their mind and settle their nerves.
- Stuff a toy with your dog's favourite foods and let them lick away! Kong is the classic brand name, but you can buy various stuffable toys in different shapes and sizes.
- Your dog can calm down and cool off when they lick a dog-friendly ice lolly or ice cubes. Simply mash up some vegetables, mix with water and freeze. These are particularly helpful in the summer as they also help to keep dogs cool!

Top tip: Keep an eye on your dog's licking behaviour. If you notice they are licking themselves more than usual, there might be a medical problem such as an infection or allergic reaction. If in doubt, a trip to the vet will put your mind at ease.

## 3. Chew

When your dog is upset about something – whether that be loneliness, boredom, or something temporary, like loud bangs outside or a change in routine – they may instinctually relieve their stress through chewing. In fact, chewing is one of the most common signs that show your dog is unhappy or bored.

Chewing is a helpful enrichment activity for dogs to engage in as it helps to regulate their mood, calm their nerves and keep their mind occupied. However, if we don't encourage our dogs to chew the right things, they could end up chewing something we don't want them to. Yep, we've all been there... chucking out a shredded leather purse, a pair of slippers or perhaps even a brand-new sofa!

To give your dog a safe and positive outlet for their chewing tendencies, try some of the following ideas:

- Natural, edible dog chews are a great way to keep your dog occupied for hours. The added tastiness will create a positive association with chewing a special item given by you (not something you left lying around).
- Your dog will love to chew their favourite toys, although not all are built to withstand the munching, biting and gnawing your pup puts them through. To ensure your dog chews safely, select high-quality toys that are designed for this purpose. Rotate your dog's chew toys regularly so that they always have something new and exciting to try.

Top tip: If you have multiple dogs in your household, be sure to provide enough chew items to go around. If your dog feels they have to guard their toy or edible chew, this could cause them even more stress.

**\*\*Comments From KountryKozy - We have purchased snuffle mats and lick mats off Amazon and found them to work great. We use canned dog food or pumpkin on the lick mats and just some of their kibble in the snuffle mats. You can also use a spatula with peanut butter on it for a quick remedy or for a distraction. *Just ensure the peanut butter you use does not contain xylitol as that is highly toxic to dogs.***

We have also found Kong toys have a long life versus other brands and is what we buy and trust.\*\*