

## How to Turn Your Dog's Natural Instincts Into a Fun Activity

Turn your dog's love of sniffing into a fun, mentally stimulating activity you both can enjoy.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- K9 Nose Work is a fairly new recreational activity dog owners can enjoy with their canine companions. It evolved from the training professional scent detection dogs receive
- Fun nose work encourages your dog's natural drive to hunt, coupled with her special talent for picking up scents and finding their source
- Any dog with a nose can get involved in nose work. It's a great outlet for all kinds of canine personalities, including reactive dogs, shy dogs, hyper dogs, seniors, pets recovering from an injury or illness, and retired service and working dogs

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Your dog is quite literally "led around by the nose" - her own nose, that is. As every dog owner is aware, canines have incredibly sensitive snouts. They learn about the world through their sense of smell. All that sniff-sniff-sniffing your dog does during nearly every waking minute is part of nature's design.

But did you know you can channel your dog's keen sense of smell and love of sniffing into an activity you can do together?

### The Sport of K9 Nose Work

K9 Nose Work, also called nose work, fun nose work, scent work, and search work, is a relatively new sport for pet dogs and their owners, created and sanctioned by the National Association of Canine Scent Work (NACSW). The activity is an offshoot of the training professional scent detection dogs ("sniffer dogs") receive. Elements of the training are used in K9 nose work, but for recreational purposes only.

Nose work encourages your dog to use his natural hunting drive and unique talent for picking up scents and locating the source.

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.

K9 nose work isn't an obedience-based activity. Instead, it works with your dog's natural instinct to hunt and track scents. There are few commands given during the activity, and no attention to the owner is required while the dog is working.

## What Dogs Can Participate in Nose Work?

Any dog with a nose can participate in nose work, so you don't have to have a typical sniffer dog – like a lab, German shepherd or bloodhound – to get your pet involved in the sport.

Some dog owners have found nose work to be a great supplement to a behavior modification program. Focusing on scent detection can help reactive dogs learn to tolerate the presence of other dogs. It can help shy dogs grow more comfortable with their surroundings, and it encourages distracted dogs to stay on task.

Nose work is also beneficial for senior dogs, dogs recovering from surgery or an injury, dogs with hearing loss or eyesight problems, and retired service, working or competition dogs. It can also provide a great outlet for hyperactive dogs.

## How the Training Works

The first step in nose work training is to build a dog's desire to hunt. Positive reinforcement is used for the dogs, while the owners learn how to read their pet's unique hunting behaviors and signals.

The next step is to add different search settings while continuing to build the dog's desire to hunt and the owner's ability to read their dog's behaviors and communication signals.

The third step involves continuing to build on the first two, and also communicating to the dog that one of the three target odors - essential oil of birch - is what he should hunt for.

Next, the dog is introduced to the other two target odors, essential oils of anise and clove.

In the final level of training, the dog continues to increase his desire to hunt for the target odors, and the working relationship between owner and dog is tested with progressively more challenging search scenarios.

There are levels of training beyond the initial five, with the highest level reserved for dogs who will go on to enter nose work competitions.

For more information on K9 Nose Work, including workshops, training and competitive trials, visit the National Association of Canine Scent Work [website](#).

## Sources and References

[The Bark, Summer 2010](#)

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