



Enrichment

What is enrichment and why is it important?

In protected care, zookeepers provide animals with all their basic needs. If this was all they did, the animals would be bored with so much extra time doing nothing. That's why enrichment is so important. Enrichment is the provision of stimuli which promotes species-appropriate behavior and mental activity.

So how does this relate to you? You can provide enrichment for your domestic animals at home, just as our keepers provide it for animals at the zoo. To help you in designing enrichment for your animals, refer to the S.P.I.D.E.R. model of enrichment design.

S.P.I.D.E.R. Model

The S.P.I.D.E.R. model of enrichment design provides you with a framework to figure out, implement and evaluate a piece of enrichment for a specific animal.

S – Setting Goals

Your goals should reflect the animal. That means you should understand the needs and behavior of the species and the individual before setting goals. Then, clearly identify the behaviors you want to encourage through enrichment. These are your goals.

P – Planning

With your goals in mind, come up with an idea of what you want the enrichment to look like and make a list of resources needed to create it. While gathering those materials, keep the safety of your animal in mind. If using tape, always use a paper tape without nylon strings! If using glue, use Elmer's glue and let it dry. Do not use glue sticks or glitter glue. To avoid other unsafe products, please use the link on the zoo webpage.

I – Implementation

Give the finished enrichment to your animal.

D – Documentation

It is important as junior zookeepers to document your animal's interaction with the enrichment. This can help you keep track of what you've done, what works, and what doesn't work. You can use pen and paper, a journal or an excel spreadsheet. You can even record the behavior with a video camera. If you do, post it to social media and tag the Oakland Zoo! Tag @oaklandzoo for instagram, @oakzoo for Facebook and Twitter, or use the #oaklandzoo!



E – Evaluation

Based on what you saw and documented, did the enrichment meet the goals you set at the beginning? Did you see the desired behavior? Were there any behaviors that you did not expect? If so, did those behaviors fit in with what is natural for the species? Did your animal appear to be interested, excited, or frustrated? How long did your animal interact with the enrichment?

R – Re-adjustment

Readjustment often happens throughout the entire process. If the enrichment did not have the desired effect, then you need to consider your evaluation before readjusting your goals and planning and implementing a new design.

Your Enrichment Challenge

Using the S.P.I.D.E.R. model, design enrichment for your domestic animals at home! Remember to document and upload to social media. Tag @oaklandzoo for Instagram, @oakzoo for Facebook and Twitter, or use the #oaklandzoo!

Age Considerations

You know your children and their capabilities best, but here are some general age guidelines in making enrichment.

Ages 3-5: Provide your junior zookeepers with pre-selected materials and allow them to decorate with washable markers and/or tempera paint (in moderation). Ask simple questions about the design, ex: do you want to put the tube on top of the box, or on the side?

Ages 6-7: Provide your junior zookeepers with pre-selected materials and allow them to decorate with washable markers and/or tempera paint (in moderation). Assist them in building the design. Have them document the animal's interaction with the enrichment.

Ages 8-9: Task your junior zookeepers with researching the species and observing your animal. Then have them gather up materials and create the enrichment. Assist only when needed. Have them document the animal's interaction with the enrichment.

Ages 10+: Much the same as ages 8-9, but have your junior zookeepers design a journal that includes sections for notes on all steps of the process. Also encourage your junior zookeepers to use the S.P.I.D.E.R. model to implement other enrichment designs as well.

Please Note

The S.P.I.D.E.R. framework might seem like a lot, but enrichment does not always have to be so involved! Allowing a cat or dog to smell you over when returning from being outside counts as enrichment, as does making a paper ball for cats to bat around. Even changing up the toys in the house counts as enrichment!