

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hey everyone, welcome back to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett, and today we are talking about time outs. That is, I mean, it's used with kids. It's used with puppies. It's used with dogs. I want to share my feelings on the matter and why I feel that every time we give a dog a time out, we are saying "you please need to take the hit for my inadequacies". Right. So that's my feeling on time out and I've got a lot to share on the matter and both how they happen, why they happen and how to make the most of them.

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I would say that is one of the most important lessons I learned on my journey to become a reinforcement-based trainer. And that my dog, Buzzy, I wrote the book [Shaping Success](#) about Buzz. And Buzzy, he got so many time outs. I would say Buzz and the dog following Buzz, my little terrier mix Decaf, those two dogs got a lot of time outs because I didn't want to use any kind of positive punishment. I didn't want to scold them or say "ah-ah" or, you know, you correct them, use a physical correction.

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And so, I didn't actually have a great understanding, certainly nowhere near what I have today, about how to have success. I knew I didn't want to do any punishment, but I didn't have clarity about how to get there. I could use reinforcement and shaping but what about that gap between when the shaping wasn't working, or the dog did something unpredictable? That's when time outs happened.

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All right. So, scientifically time outs are negative punishment. The negative means you are taking something away from the dog. And the punishment means it suppresses what the dog is doing. They don't like it if you put it in, you know, in a general layman's terms. So, taking something away, dogs don't like it. What could we be taking away?

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Well, let's say your dog is shredding your pair of shoes. You take those pair of shoes away, they don't like it. We've taken something away and they found the environment that they were in very reinforcing and you've stopped that reinforcement. So, the form of a time out generally it could be, you know, most people think about taking the dog somewhere. They'll put them in their crate. That's just one form. I categorize time outs into mild, moderate, and more severe.

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So, a mild time out could be, I would just freeze. Something I do all the time when I'm training puppies. It would just be a very mild freeze. And I don't look at them. I don't say anything to them. And then when they stop what they doing I'll move forward. So that's a very, like a matter of seconds. Time outs could just be my gaze. I turned my gaze away. It could be, I stopped talking. So, if I'm playing tug with my puppy and I— I love to sing to my puppies. It's not weird. You're allowed to sing too. You know, showtunes anything you like, hip hop, whatever. Keep the language clean though would ya?



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So, I'll be tugging and I'm often just, you know, singing or babbling to my puppy. And if they go from tugging on the toy to grabbing my hand, I stopped singing. I stopped moving the toy, they get off my hand and back on the toy, I start singing again. Life is good. Everyone's happy.

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So, the time out, what we're taking away could be attention in the form of the fact that we are talking. Are we looking at the dog? It could be our motion. For example, if you're walking and your dog starts pulling on leash, you stop that motion. They aren't getting any reinforcement until they come back into position. So that could be a time out. These are what I classify as my mild time outs.

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So, my attention, it could even be like if a dog was jumping up, I might turn my back on them. So, they don't get my eyes. I won't speak to them. They don't even get my physical presence of looking forward to where my body facing them. I turned my back to them. So those are mild time outs. A moderate time out, I might use with one of my trained dogs and it might be, I send them to what I call the Hot Zone, which could be a bed. It could be hopping it up on the table, could be hopping them—I say, "hop it up". That's my cue. So, hopping it up. It's, you know, it's a verb of the cue to hop up. Welcome to the language that is Susan Garrett.

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So, hopping it up on the couch or in their hot zone. Yeah. If I decided to give a dog a time out again - back to a puppy - I might just take the collar. Let's say that they are grabbing my pant leg, I might take the collar. That's what I call a moderate time out. A more severe time out would be confinement. So, it would be putting the dog in a crate or maybe locking them in your bedroom. I want you to make note of all of those. Those are all the things that I would use if I was using time outs. And I'm going to go back to the fact when I said off the top here, I believe that when I'm giving a dog a time out I'm saying, *"please, will you pay the price for my inadequacies as a trainer"*.

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That's what I'm saying to my dog. Right? Because that's what I've learned in all the 30 years of teaching and dissecting and watching behavior. And what I've learned is the better we get at reinforcement, the less we ever need to punish a dog. And time outs are punishment. I already told you they are negative punishment. And the challenge with punishment of any form, punishment has fallout. In that it creates a small stress. It could be a big stress depending on how severe the punishment is. But even a time out is a stressor. And the more we use time outs, whether it be a child or a dog, the more we use time outs, the more anxiety we are creating for that dog or that child.

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For example, a friend of mine came to me and said that their son would get excited when he would play with their daughter, their younger daughter, who is a lot smaller. And he would push her and knock her over and she would cry. And they send them to the time out chair in the corner. And when he was there, they would go talk to him and he was all always really upset and he would cry and he would say, sorry, he didn't mean to, and it happened time and time again. That's a big red flag. If you're giving a time out and you're not seeing a change of behavior, then why are you continuing to do this? Right? So, I helped them modified the environment to help their son see how to be successful and engaging with their daughter.



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And that's my number one rule of giving a time out. If I am going to give a time out number one, I am pretty confident that that animal knows how to be successful. So, let's say you come into a home and a puppy starts jumping on you, you turning your back on them. You know, it's a mild punisher but has the puppy had any training whatsoever on the appropriate way to greet people then if they haven't, is it fair to give them a time out?

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It would be like you driving your car, you're going through an area you know it's 50 and the police officer pulls you over and said, "you're getting a ticket. You are going 50 and it's a 20." "No, it's not. I drive this road all the time. It's a 50." "No, we changed it a couple of weeks ago, but we haven't got around to changing the signs yet." How frustrating would that be? You're getting punished and you didn't know how to be right. Welcome to your dog's world.

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So, you never ever give a punisher. A time out. And that when I say punisher, I'm always meaning time out because I would never use a positive punisher. Never give a time out unless you are confident the dog knows the rules and knows how to be successful. All right. So that's number one.

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Number two, that training environment is one rich of reinforcement that the dog is for sure having a great time and they are, because here's what happens, at a time out, a negative punishment can easily turn into a negative reinforcement. Now, what does that mean? It means when you say to your dog, "you're getting a time out and you're going to go to my bedroom." Now, if the dog didn't like working with you in the first place, if what you were doing was not that much fun and the dog just started shutting down and sniffing, and you said, "okay, you're done." Your dog singing, 'Ding dong the witch is dead' and skipping all the way to your bedroom.

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Because all of a sudden, you sending them off is a reinforcement. It is not a punishment. So, I see it all the time in the sport of dog agility, where the dog is running off and visiting the judge. And the dog is, you know, stopping and scratching or sniffing and they're showing obvious signs that they are not having fun in agility and their owner goes, "that's it. You're getting a time out." And the dog going, "yay! Wee! I am so happy. This is so cool". So, what's the solution to that? Don't ask the dog to do agility until you're a hundred percent sure that the foundation you've laid is one that ensures the dog is having fun when they're playing the sport. Right? So that's topic for a different conversation.

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But that's the second rule of giving a time out, right? It is that what you were doing is reinforcing to the dog. So that, rule number one, the dog knows how to be successful. Rule number two, that the environment that you're training in is one that's got a lot of reinforcement. So, the dog doesn't really want to leave it. Number three, your time out has got to be non-emotional. Right. When we're making that transition, for those of you who are transitioning from being a balanced trainer or trainer who uses positive punishment or corrections to one that we're going to use games and reinforcement to teach what we want. When we transitioned in that, and we're going to give a time out.



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If you always say, "I'm going to give a time out, you're going to pay the price for my inadequacies as a trainer". You— it'll be easy to be unemotional, right? Time outs shouldn't happen "get in your kennel! You get in your kennel now!" That's not a time out. That's a positive punisher. That's adding stress. All right. That's not cool. Remember, we're giving a time out because we sucked as a trainer, so let's not make the dog pay that price.

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Make sure that you're recordkeeping every time this happens, because if you see a pattern that you're giving your dog a time out every single time they see a rabbit or every single time Aunt Martha comes to visit, then you haven't prepared the dog how to be successful when Aunt Martha comes to visit.

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Right. So, if you record keep, you absolutely will know where your dog training needs to focus. All right. So, my next rule, rule number five. The place where you're sending the dog or taking the dog in this time out when we're using more moderate or severe types of time outs, like you're telling them to go in their crate or into a room that is not meant to be scary or bad, or like stressful to the dog.

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The punishment - really listen to this, lean in, come on, listen - the punishment isn't that the dog's being sent somewhere scary or icky or cold or dark or horrid. The punishment is that you are stopping the reinforcement they're getting from playing with you. Boom. Therefore, it's got to be reinforcing when they're playing with you.

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So, I seen people put their dog in a broom closet for a time out or chain them in their cellar. Oh, nay nay! That's not training a dog with kindness. So, if I ever use a time out, the location the dog is going is one that's filled with reinforcement. This goes back to our last episode, [episode number 33](#), that we just put out where I was explaining that when I give a dog a time out, I'm going to put them in their crate or take them by the collar and take them out of the kitchen or put them in a hot zone.

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And people might've been thinking, but we just gave them lots of cookies for collar grabbing. We just gave them lots of cookies for putting them in a Hot Zone. Exactly. If I'm giving them a time out, I want that the color grab is 99 times more reinforcing than it is ever punitive. So, if I'm giving you a time out, it would be, you know, one to 10% of the time that I would grab your collar to give you a time out. Because otherwise your dog's going to get really good at avoiding your hand if you are grabbing their collar for punishment, or if you're putting them in their Hot Zone or their crate for punishment. They're going to start putting on the brakes before they get anywhere near that door.

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Right. So, the location that you're taking them for that time out has got to be filled with more reinforcement than it ever is used for punishment. I mean, I used to say rule of thumb, a dog in any training environment should have no more than 15% time outs. You should try to get that to 1%. You know, that should be your goal. A time out needs to be immediate. You cannot come home and find poop on the rug and then give a dog a time out. It's not effective.



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I remember watching a friend of mine. We were driving somewhere. Her kids were acting up in their car seats and she told them that they were in trouble. And when they get home, they were going to be, it was a 30-minute drive and by the last 20 minutes, her kids had settled down and they were having great conversation with me. When we got home, she gave them a time out. How does that make sense? If you are going to, it's like there is a moment. There is a magic moment. If you miss the magic moment, you need to set it free and let it go and just work hard to do better the next time.

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The moment needs to be timely. You see something you say, all right I think I'm going to make the decision to give a time out. Now, the question is, do you mark it - some people say, "right you're going to time out." If I ever mark it, I would say things like "you win the prize!" "You're going to go to your hot zone." "You're going into your crate. You win the prize!" And that dog's going to be like, "I don't want this prize. What, why, why are we getting this prize?" So, they're going to work hard at not winning that prize next time. That's the idea.

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So, it needs to be timely. And it needs to be a pause to allow the dog to regroup and come back and be successful. A pause isn't counted in hours. A time out can be a matter of seconds when I'm, you know, just, I might be averting my eyes or freezing or stop my talking. It could be a matter of minutes, but it shouldn't go on longer than that.

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You know, sometimes it's a pause for me. If I give a dog a time out these days is more likely it's for me. Because I can't figure out what's going on and I need to regroup and go to my notes and see what I've written in my records and see how I can do better.

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Okay. So, you want to think about "how can I avoid using time outs?". And the way you're going to avoid using time outs goes back to episode number 6 here on Shaped by Dog, "[The Art of Manipulation](#)". You're going to manipulate your environment to set that dog up for success. And you're going to get really good with your mechanics so that your training goes fast and then you could end it.

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Because if you are sending a dog or giving a dog a time out constantly, what we're saying is time away from you is bad. What happens when you want to go to work, you're going to be creating so much anxiety for the dog to be left alone or be sent away from you. You potentially will be creating more anxiety when you're not there. So, minimize. Ideally eliminate time outs.

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So, if you know that your dog goes cray cray and jumps all over Aunt Martha then set your dog up for success. Train as much as you can. And if you aren't willing to bet me a hundred dollars at your dog's going to have success, then put the cra— I almost said, "put Aunt Martha in the crate". Put your dog in a crate, give them a stuffed Topple or a stuffed Kong when Aunt Martha comes so that when all the excitement of Aunt Martha arriving dies down, then you can bring him out on leash where he can be successful.





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So set the dog up for success and you are only - remember anytime you're giving a time out you're saying to your dog, "I'm sorry pal, you're paying the price for my inadequacies". If you keep that mindset, I know you're going to minimize the amount of time outs you used with your dog. And I know your relationship with your dog is going to soar and you are going to be a great science-based trainer who's going to look for better ways to create solutions for your dog using games and reinforcement.

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That's it for this time on Shaped by Dog. I look forward to seeing you next time.

Resources:

[Book: Shaping Success](#)

[Podcast Episode 33: How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!](#)

[Podcast Episode 6: The Art of Manipulation](#)



About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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