

Is a Resistant Dog a Stubborn Dog?

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Hey, everybody. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. I am Susan Garrett. Today I am talking about resistance. The resistance, it's the same thing that you might see in a dog who doesn't want to do something. People might call that dog stubborn or being defiant. You might see it in a toddler. You might see it in a teenager, in a spouse, in a co-worker. It's, you know, the body language and the person with digging in and just not doing it. They're showing resistance to what you want to do.

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Today, we're going to talk about what to do when your dog shows resistance, why they might do it, what the long run repercussions are and how to avoid it or overcome it. And I'll give you a little insight. This is going to work the same for a toddler as it will for a puppy as it will for a co-worker. Exactly the same thing. So first of all, let's just talk about resistance. Now there's two different approaches when met with resistance. It could be the person, the child might say, "Oh, I can't do that. I don't want to do that. Or I can't do that." And one approach is, we can say, "Well, yes, you can do it and you must do it. Just get over it and do it." Or you could work at conditioning the situation. And so that person says, "I'm a little apprehensive, but I really want to try." That's the place we want to get to with our dogs.

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I might be a little apprehensive, but I really am encouraged, and I want to try. What are some things that might be creating resistance? It could be something that the dog sees, they smell, they taste, believe it or not yes. It could be something they feel, it could be a confinement that they're in. Could be as something as simple as they don't want to leave comfort for what they perceive as discomfort.

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Like the kids don't want to leave the TV to come and do something you want, like make your bed or come to dinner. Right. So, its resistance has shown up like with a puppy. They see a new person and you want them to meet them. They might show that resistance and backup behind your legs. "No, I don't really want to do that." That's showing resistance to what you want them to do. It could be like a sound. We had a dog. We would put little wraps on her legs and the sound of the Velcro, she showed great resistance when she saw the Velcro for the next time. "No, no, no, no. Don't like that sound." There is a resistance to doing what you want and the dog backs away, he doesn't want to do it.

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Tater, he shows great resistance when you make this sound, "ppffff" like it freaks him out. So, dogs can have resistance to various sounds. It could be, believe it or not, a taste. So, every night I give Swagger CBD oil, but it's flavored with lavender, not flavored. They put lavender oil in there.

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Can you imagine eating lavender oil? Like to me, it'd be like eating shampoo. No. And guess what? He is not crazy about it, but I have overcome that resistance by good conditioning. What I'm going to share with you today. It could be maybe you're brushing your dog's teeth, or you're going to think about brushing your dog's teeth.



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Something that the dog feels like putting on a harness or walking the new puppies that we have, walking them on a leash for the first time. An Elizabethan collar, like when you go to the vet and the dog has an injury and they put those big collars on the dog. There's great resistance to that, right. The dog might walk backwards in a circle and spin. It could be the resistance to being in confinement, being held, being examined, being held and confined, being put in a crate or being put on a head halter. Which I will acknowledge every dog I've ever owned since the 80s has spent time on a head halter and my new puppy, This! will spend time on a head halter.

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The difference is I likely use a head halter differently than any other professional trainer out there, unless they've actually come through my program, more on that later. Right. So, the resistance sometimes it's from the unknown. The resistance sometimes is a fear and you could take the approach, you're doing it because I said so, which leads to a more adversarial relationship with your dog.

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But what we want is to have this relationship where the dog says, "I'm a little bit scared, but I'm going to try it for you." That's what our goal is. And that's when you're approaching resistance from a point of conditioning the dog. It's a complete game changer. It's unbelievable. So, when I see resistance in a dog that I'm training, number one, the first thing that comes to mind, "Susan, you've missed a step somewhere. Your training plan is flawed."

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Now let's just say, what does it look like when a dog shows resistance? Now be as simple as them disengaging, sniffing the floor, maybe scratching their ear. If you're shaping, it's like you're both staring at it each other, or your navel gazing and he's naval gazing, and he's not offering what you want and you're just waiting for him to offer what you want. And he's waiting for a hint and you're waiting for some movement and it's like, I call it, you're counting the lint in your belly button while nothing happens. Right. So that looks as a mild version of resistance.

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On the higher end, resistance could be a dog barking or just freaking out. They might, you know, start snapping or fighting. If it's in confinement, they'll bite the bars of a crate, or they might paw at a head halter or start spinning when they're on a leash. Like there's so many different things. Like it could be like a temper tantrum right there. You might label it as a temper tantrum. All it is, is a dog screaming at you. Your plan was flawed. You did not consider my emotional wellbeing when you slap this thing on me or when you threw me into this pool, when you asked me to do something without preparing me for the best possible outcome for me, that's the way dogs show resistance.

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And again, what I see is it's my dog or puppy saying you missed a step. It could possibly be a sign of a relationship struggle. So either there is an experience with that dog that has built a lack of trust in you, or it could be that it's a brand new relationship as with a new rescue dog or a new puppy that there hasn't been the time or the positive outcomes from training together to create that amazing relationship. So, resistance could be a sign of a relationship challenge. It could be a sign of a lack of confidence and definitely a lack of trust in you, when you're asking them to do this. Sometimes the resistance has a dog immediately going into lizard brain.



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Now, if you have been listening to, or watching our episodes here on Shaped by Dog [episode number 7](#), I talked about lizard brain and how a dog who goes into lizard brain is going into protection mode and they are not in the optimal zone for learning. So, if you have that dog, like some people might say, "Oh, you know, he's being defiant. Give them a little correction." But you need to take it upon yourself to say, "I've moved too fast. This isn't the kind of relationship that I envision for the two of us. And I'm going to back off, I'm going to go back and listen to Susan Garrett's podcast where she talks about resistance and how I can get my dog into the optimal zone of learning."

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In [episode number 4](#) here on Shaped by Dog, we talked about the TEMP, your dog's tail and ears and eyes and mouth and posture. I remember the very first dog I ever trained back in 1988 and its little Jack Russell terrier, Shelby. She was awesome. She just loved to work. She engaged with me. We were in a puppy class, in one of the exercises they said "okay, you're going to walk your little puppy to the middle of the room and there's going to be people kneeling down and they're going to call your puppy and they're going to feed your puppy. And you're going to do that a couple of times."

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And I remember seeing little Shelby prancing. The little terrier pranced. She was just so excited. "Oh hi! Hi! I'm going to meet you." And after about second or third time, they said in once the puppy is going to meet the person going behind them and say the word, "come" and pop them and they were on a choke chain. Pop them so that they learn when they hear the word "come", they need to respond. Well after two repetitions of that, my prancing little happy, love everybody, I think she was 14 or 15 weeks old at the time, Jack Russell turned into bug eyes, ears pinned, tail down, crawling towards that person. And then she just went like a rock and wouldn't come closer.

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Now that hurt my heart. Today I know that was a flawed approach and anything that creates the expression of resistance in that way needs to be a neon light to you to say, "you have screwed up." So, dogs that get that look like people say he knows better because he looks all guilty. That's a dog who has been put in a place of resistance.

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You shouldn't look at the dog as if he was guilty. Look at yourself that you are guilty. You didn't set your dog up in a confidence building environment. You didn't set yourself up for training. So, what can we do with this? How can we make it better as dog lovers who want to bring out the best in our dogs?

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I'm not saying there can never be a point where the dogs have to think about what they're doing in training. But that shouldn't be a meltdown point for your dog. And if it is, then you need to look at what you've done. So, from my point of view, good intentional conditioning prevents resistance in the dog. Or if it's already there, maybe it's a rescue dog or you've done some mistakes in your training, it can melt the resistance in your dog by creating a zone of optimal training for you. And what that does is it decreases the struggle. It decreases the navel gazing. It increases the cooperation, increases your dog's trust, increases your dog's confidence in you, which leads to a better relationship with your dog.



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Now the flip side of that is just hoping for the best and slapping that big old Elizabethan collar on your dog or slapping the harness on your dog and “that’s a minor thing. He’ll get over it.” Just winging something that can lead to a massive increase in resistance, which builds emotional walls from that dog. They’re protecting themselves from the tools you’re using from the situations you’re putting them in. And eventually they’re protecting themselves from you. That is not the kind of relationship you should hope for with your dog.

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What’s going to make a difference is the approach you take to training. So, I’m going to go back to these puppies because this is exactly the same approach I would be taking if it was a rescue dog. There’s five key elements that I’ll put in the training and these five elements create confidence. So, I will do each one, as I mentioned in [my last podcast episode](#), I play small to play big. I build confidence in small places and I go to multiple little small places and bring out the best in that dog by bringing out their confidence and their trust in me.

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So, the five behaviours. Number one, tug. Tug when I say, and then you’re going to disengage from me and then tug again. All right. Number two, [ItsYerChoice](#) with food. And I start with the food up high and then go all the way down so I can have the food on the ground, and I can do tug and the food on the ground at the same time. Number three, I’m shaping the sit by creating a dog who has to make choices. When I’m tugging, as soon as I become passive, disengage from the toy and go into a sit and that creates a new game of tug. So, it’s a tug-sit-tug game.

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Right. So, the dog is learning. Even though I might not want to disengage from the tug, I know it leads to an opportunity to play more tug with you in a way that creates more like I’m more fun. So, when I become passive, I don’t talk to the dog, I don’t say anything. But they want me to go, “Yeah! get it, get it, get it!” and have fun and smack a baby and pat them and engage with them and have fun with them. But as soon as I become passive, they’re like, “well, how can I get that person to be more fun?”

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“I’ll go into a sit and then she says tug again, and then we have lots of fun again.” So, they’re learning that instead of having a foundation of “Give me, give me, give me. I want that food. I’m going to grab it. I want that tug. I’m going to grab it.” The brain is shifting in that dog and it’s going to, “How can I earn what I want from you? Ooh, I like, I’m going to look at you really intently because I don’t have to try and steal from you. I don’t have to try and outwit you. I don’t have to try and be sneaky with you. Because you are fair, and you set up obvious criteria for me to be successful.” And that’s how we have a dog that’s starting to learn.

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So, then I go to [Crate Games](#). Because all the elements above create a dog who easily can learn Crate Games and finally, I do [Hand Targets](#), which is a building foundation for many, many other behaviours. So, I’ve got those five things. Now I mentioned that I use a head halter in my training. I love using a head halter. And one of the big differences and I’m going to jump into why I love the head halter in my next episode.



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But one of the big differences that I do is I spent an incredible amount of time conditioning love of a head halter. You could say, "Well, why do I care?" Number one, it's just training with your dog, it's fun. Even if you never need a head halter, I'll only put a head halter on a dog when I need it. But I want them to look at it and go, "Oh, a head halter. Can I have that on?" My dogs, none of my dogs end up loving a head halter, but none of them end up resisting a head halter. They go, "Okay, I'll put the head halter on."

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So, I could take any one of my dogs and hold out a head halter and they'd happily without pinning their ears and looking like, you know, I just stole their baby, they'll happily put that head halter on. I get that by strategically conditioning it. And I'll just share with you a few games that I'll use. So, the first one involves a canning funnel. So, a simple canning funnels, it's got a big opening at one end that goes into your canning jars.

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So, all that I'll do is I'll put this on the ground, and I'll put a treat in there and let the dog eat the treat off of the ground through the canning funnel. And when the dog says, "Okay, that's cool. I have value for this." Now I'm going to pick it up off the ground, so the dog has to stick their nose through it. And the nice thing about a canning funnel is I can start feeding them at the other end of the canning funnel. Now I can move it all around the dog's like, "That's a fun game. I like it. Boom." They stick their nose through.

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And once we got that, I break it up with some tug because that's a game that they trust. And in the tug game, then I'll stop, and I'll hold my end of my handle out as a target. So, they've just saw the canning funnels as a target. Now I'm making the end of my handle, my tug toy as a target. And if you don't have a tug toy you can use your leash handle.

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The dog sticks their nose through there, they get cookie, cookie, cookie. I take it off and we play tug. And this happens and I might even pinch up the handle to make it little tighter around their muzzle, playing get the cookie, and I might move their head around, get the cookie, take it off, tug, tug, tug, tug, tug. Do you see where I'm leading? I've got a dog who is conditioned to want to put their nose through. So then when I finally get to a head halter, I can just hold the head halter up. Well, they've played those games of, "Oh yeah, there's a target and I stick my nose through it." They'll happily going to put their nose on a head halter.

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Now that's a long way away from when I wrote my book, [Ruff Love](#). I recommended you put a head halter on a dog and leave it on for three days. Just tie it up so they couldn't get at it. But that allows a dog to get used to it. The way my puppies got used to a collar, I put a collar on them when they were born. So, it was all they knew. Putting a head halter on a lot of dogs like that, they're going to fight and they're going to pot their feet and they're going to rub it on the ground. And this is going to be horrible. So, I think one of the main differences in how I would approach Ruff Love today, I would condition the head halter, condition the dog to love a head halter.



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And a head halter and I'll get into it more in the next episode. A head halter to me, I look at it for, the same thing we would use a leash, a crate, or a seatbelt for us humans. Right. So, there's nobody on this planet that says, "Oh, I love wearing my seat belt." No, they're uncomfortable. They're restricting. We don't love them, but we use them. And for those of you say, "No, Susan, no, no, no, no. I love my seatbelts." Well, if you love your seatbelt, why didn't you have them installed in the couch in the living room? You don't really love them. You tolerate them.

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And that's why I put in all these conditioning steps for a head halter is for that my dog, they see the head holder and they go, "Oh yeah, put that on because I'm been conditioned to love it." The conditioning steps need to be taken away from the actual thing that you're doing. So, if you want to condition a dog to put a harness on their body, you might start with the canning funnel game. You got to get their head to a target on most body harnesses, whatever it is, whether it be getting a dog who loves to swim or who loves to wear a leash, who loves to wear a head halter or a body harness or whatever it is, take the time to condition it.

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Don't leave it to chance. Don't say, "Oh, he'll get over it." Because by putting in the time and investing in your dog, you are investing in that relationship you have with your dog, you are building the trust, you're not breaking the trust. And your dog will look forward to doing more and more with you. And that's where you can do things like conditioning the dog for things that are maybe uncomfortable, like cutting their nails. You can condition them when they have that trust in that relationship.

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You can condition them to do things that maybe they wouldn't like to do, but then they happily learn to offer to do it because it's something they get to do with you and you've put a lot of value in. A dog showing resistance is showing you where there is no value, both no value in the activity and very little value in your relationship with that dog.

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Next time here on Shaped by Dog, we're going to talk all about why I love a head halter so much and how I use it. That will be next time. We'll see you then.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 7: You, Your Dog, Maslow and Lizard Brain](#)

[Podcast Episode 4: T.E.M.P. \(Tail, Eyes/Ears, Mouth, Posture\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 38: 3 Keys to a Confident Dog](#)

[Game: Learn how to play ItsYerChoice \(IYC\)](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

[Book: "Ruff Love" by Susan Garrett](#)

[Hand Targets in the Video Blog: How to Train Your Dog to Stand on Cue](#)



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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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