

Preventing Dog Aggression: Introducing Dogs or Puppies with Project Togetherness

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG When you have two or more dogs, your wish as a dog owner is that they all get along fantastic but sometimes it just doesn't happen. Well today, I'm going to share with you how I intentionally arrange for that to happen. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And if you're watching this on [YouTube](#), go ahead and hit the like button now.

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And if you're watching this on YouTube, check out my new sweatshirt. How cool is that right? My friends at [4MyMerles.com](#), they sent me this amazing, embroidered sweatshirt and what's better they got it for sale on their website right now. Along with of course all of my favorite tug toys. So, check out [4MyMerles.com](#) and if you're from the US, like this is Canadian shopping, so it's practically free. Like we practically pay you to do the shopping.

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The togetherness project or "Project Togetherness". I'm going to preface this by saying, if you have a dog aggression problem, this is like putting a band aid on a little gasoline fire. It's probably not the best thing for you to try. So, before you ever attempt anything like this, I would like you to seek out the advice of a Veterinary Behaviorist. Give them the protocol that you've written down from this podcast and say, "I'm thinking of trying it with these two dogs." and let them tell you if that's a really good idea.

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When would you use this? I use this every time I get a new puppy. I know that some of my dogs, especially my older dogs are less tolerant around puppies. And so, I intentionally plan for them to get along by doing a project togetherness. I have done this when I've brought rescue dogs into the house. But before you entertain any of it you've got to know if you've got two dogs that are pretty friendly, this is going to work. Right.

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And you might say, "Well then why would I bother if they get along?" Because why not? A, it's fun. B, it's reinforcing. C, you're helping to plant the seeds that this dog is really going to look forward to seeing that dog. I don't know if you were ever a fan of Big Bang Theory, but there was one episode when Sheldon was shaping Penny. Every time she did something he would say "Here have a chocolate." Right. So, what's that doing it's not only building a bond between them but it's Penny is going to be doing things for Sheldon going, "Hey, I like doing things for this guy. I don't know why."

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So same idea. You might have friendly, friendly dog. You might have a cranky dog and a friendly dog, or you might have two cranky dogs. Now remember I said when I say cranky, let me just go through what some of the [signs of 'I'm not super comfortable](#) with what's going on'. And these are [emotional states](#). So, if you remember what I was talking about in [podcast number 71](#), when I was working on my puppy's resource guarding again in emotional state. If your dog training a problem, you've got to deal with the emotion of that problem first. So, a dog might be eating, and they freeze if another dog comes by. That's 'I'm not comfortable with that dog near me.'



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And that's fair, that's pretty common. Or they could just be doing anything and if another dog comes by, they might put their head up and just freeze. So freezing is a sign of 'I'm not comfortable.' Staring at another dog and depending on the breed of dog, they might start stalking that other dog. They might rush towards them and stop when they get close. Or they bite rush towards them and then turn and body bump them.

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Or they might just subtly block that other dog's path. So, these are all really subtle signs that 'I'm not comfortable with this other dog right now.' Now there might come the more overt sign. So, the first five signs you may or may not even see them but I'm telling you them because I want you to start to look for them.

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That's a sign that, you know, our dogs have so little ways to communicate with us. We've got to, if we're going to own dogs, we've got to start picking up on these subtle little ways. They might do the overt, like lip curling, like just look at the dog and they might not say a word, just curl up their lips and show their pearly whites. Depending on what else is accompanying that. That could be a submissive smile that "I'm really intimidating by that dog nearby." Or it could be a "you know what, bug off, get your own sandwich" kind of a look.

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Now of course growling is an obvious sign. Air snapping might come after growling. They just snap at the air and that might be accompanied by like all of these could be any one of them could happen at the same time. They might freeze, stare, stalk, rush, body slam and then air snap, and then they might do the next one which would be muzzle grab. So, they might muzzle grab, or they might muzzle grab and give a shake, or they might grab the jowls and give a little shake.

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And so, all of this is escalating and then they might just jump the other dog. Now they might jump them and just make a lot of noise, but not actually put their mouth like if you check out the other dog after there isn't even a saliva trail on them. Then the annoyance can turn to aggression and it gets worse from there. So, if you've got anything from lip curling beyond, I would encourage you to check out the advice of a Behaviorist before you carry on with, I'm going to tell you, especially if you have a brand-new dog or you're a first-time dog owner. Right.

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Chances are you've got a hundred percent completely normal dog. There is nothing wrong. All that I encourage you to see a Behaviorist about is because you have a normal dog but you're new to all of this. And so, you need some help to come up to speed real quick. And a Veterinary Behaviorist is a great person to be able to help you with that.

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All right. So, we've got these dogs and we want them to get along. So, if I have like a puppy visiting for the day, I don't just let them come into the house because chances are one of my adult dogs, because it's going to get caught off guard. It might discipline that puppy by giving them a little snap or it could be an air snap. It could be a lunge.



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And I am a hundred percent confident that none of the dogs in my house would ever hurt a puppy, but that darn well is going to scare that puppy. And so, I don't want that to happen. People will say, "Oh, he needed that. He needed to be down, brought down a couple pegs." You know what? You don't know what's happening to that dog.

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And that kind of interaction could actually make them lose all confidence and a fearful dog could then turn into an aggressive dog. So, we want to protect our puppy's confidence and help them to behave appropriately with dogs and puppies of all ages. All right. So, project togetherness, it started for me, I made sure my puppy was always safe in an ex-pen in the kitchen. And I know my adult dogs are going to ignore them. Now I used to have a dog Buzzy, and sometimes he would rush up to the gate and snap at the puppy.

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So, then project togetherness had to happen with him separately so that he learned it was great when a puppy was in an ex-pen in his environment. I have a problem with that, like similar to that with Feature. She loves to look out the front window. Now, a strange dog, sometimes dogs, come over from the golf course, but if they come up the front door, then she will go at them like Cujo at the front door, just snarling and snapping at the glass.

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It's pretty scary. And so, she would do that with This! as a puppy. And so immediately I knew that was an opportunity to change the connection that she saw with this puppy. "Project Togetherness". So, what does that look like? At first, when all the other puppies had gone home, I think This! was maybe 9 and a half or 10 weeks old.

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So, it was just her and my other dogs. I started every day with Feature. I taught the puppy our Hot Zone game, which is you stay in a bed until I give you a release word. And I had her go from one bed to another bed. And once she could reliably go from one bed to another bed and get another cookie, then I brought Feature into the picture. And I put Feature in one bed further away.

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And the puppy I kept on leash because I didn't want the puppy to go, "Oh, hi! You look like somebody I'd like to get to know!" Because I don't want that to happen. So, if you have a dog that might, you know, snarl, snap, lip— you— I would put that dog on a muzzle for project togetherness just to make sure there is no chance of any dog getting hurt. Now, you're putting a dog on a muzzle. You have to desensitize that dog to the muzzle.

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You can't just go "You've never worn a muzzle. I'm putting this on." It's got to be something the dog likes first. Okay. But I digress. So, I have my dogs and the puppy in one bed, and I'll have her go to another bed. So now Feature sees this puppy moving and when the puppy gets into one bed, she gets a cookie and Feature gets a cookie. And the first day that's all I would do is have the puppy move further away.



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And eventually I brought the beds, not super close, but close enough that now I could ask Feature to move from one bed to another. And eventually every day I would have them just moving back and forth from different beds. What I was doing was conditioning for her that when I'm doing stuff with this puppy, good things happen. And I want to tell you, the treats I use for this activity, Feature would never get them at any other time outside of project togetherness.

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Then when I saw her going out the front door at this puppy, number one, this is number one rule for any kind of project togetherness, do not allow these out two dogs to interact with outside of project togetherness. So, if you know there's a chance that one dog might not like another dog or one dog might say something about the other dogs, mother and army boots, then what you're going to do is make sure that they're [supervised](#) with you.

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You're always in the room if they're going to be together. And if they're left alone, they're left in separate rooms or in an ex-pen or whatever. So, the moment that I saw Feature go at the front door I thought, "Okay, I'm not letting that puppy go up the stairs on her own" - which puppies shouldn't go up the stairs on their own at that age anyway, she got away.

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So, what I would do is I would carry her up the stairs. I would open the door and then I would do this what we call "Easter Biscuits" that comes from my now passed friend, Helen King. She would throw cookies on the floor and say "Easter Biscuits" to her dog. So, I would walk through the front door before Feature had a time - a chance to snarl - I would open the door, say "Easter Biscuits", and I throw a handful of cookies on the floor. Really good cookies.

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So, after two events like this, now how many times a day does a puppy have to go outside? Feature might be at the front door, every time she knew that the puppy was going outside, she ran to the front door. And she'd be waiting because when the puppy came in, she got Easter Biscuits.

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Right. So, I did that, and I went from throwing a handful of cookies on the floor to just giving her one cookie after probably two weeks of doing this, I just gave her one cookie as I passed her. So now she always looked forward to that puppy going passed. Okay. Another thing that you could do, you can do things like Easter Biscuits, throw cookies so that they get to search them, but be careful.

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I would do this as part of project togetherness with either both dogs in an ex-pen near each other, because a lot of dogs, if one dog is sniffing resources, cookies or resources, and the other dog is nearby, they might start snarling. So, they're in ex-pens separately. Or if you know this isn't going to happen, you could have one in ex-pen and one outside. I wouldn't do them together unless you're a hundred percent sure they're friendly. So, I can throw a handful of cookies on the floor for Easter Biscuits and my dogs will all just eat what they can get close to. Some of them like Tater Salad may go, "Excuse me, pardon me, student council coming in. I think that one's mine too." He'll try and get them all but if another one says, "No, that's mine." He's like, "Oh, sorry. My bad."



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So, know your dogs before you do Easter Biscuits out in the open. All right. Now mealtime. I would make sure the goal of project togetherness is anything that your dog loves. Let's say we have one dog that we're wanting to be happy to get along with this other dog.

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Anything that dog loves this dog appears before it happens. So, let's say you're going to go to the park. Then we're going to say, "Okay, you two get into the Friendship Bed." Now it could be two beds beside each other. Eventually it could be one big bed. They just have to get on the Friendship Bed. They each get a cookie and then you go to the car.

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Or they get on the Friendship Bed, everybody gets a cookie, you go for your walk. Run to the Friendship Bed, you each get a cookie and whatever it is that you love we're going to do now. So, before I would put a bowl out to start feeding a dog, I would say you get on the Friendship Bed. You get a cookie. Now you each go to wherever your ex-pens or your spots. You go when I start feeding dogs and then I'll go and get the bowls out. Friendship Bed precedes the bowl.

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So, I don't get the bowls out and then take it on the Friendship Bed. I get them on the Friendship Bed, get the bowl, and then I separate them so that while I'm preparing the bowls, I don't have anybody talking about the way that they're combing their hair today.

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All right. So now when it's feeding time, I'll put them very close to each other and eventually I get them, so their bowls are touching. Now, your dog's body language will tell you if that's a possibility or not. Again, one dog might be in an ex-pen and the other dog outside the ex-pen. You - obviously you need to be very careful with this.

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And again, a Behaviorist is never a but a phone call away. I'm sure they would happily do an on-Zoom consult with you if you have any questions about this. All right. The other thing that I like to do is I like to teach my dogs to [touch their nose to my hand](#). Now I have a [video on YouTube](#) about nose touching, so you can check that out.

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But what I do is I get one dog touching one side and the other touching the other side. So, if one dog is in an ex-pen and I'll put this hand up against the ex-pen and he can touch that, and that dog can touch that and they both get cookies. Eventually outside of the ex-pen, I'll put my hand up and they both rush in and they touch. So, it was like two faces rushing towards each other, but good things happen.

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They get— now again, this would be later on in project togetherness. I'm not going to do this right upfront. The most important thing about this is - number one - as I mentioned, [prevent the rehearsals](#) of inappropriate behavior. Number two, as I mentioned at [episode number 71](#), you need to record keep.



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So, if you're really committed to changing the way your dogs look at each other, in [episode number 14](#), I ranked how I see dogs living in a multi dog household, like, you know, do they hate each other? Do they tolerate each other? Our goal is to move a dog from one level up to the next so that ideally all of the dogs are in the acknowledge state. It would be great if everyone was in the adore stage, but that doesn't happen.

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Very often some dog, you might have a household with just two dogs, and they would adore each other absolutely. The more dogs, maybe they don't all adore each other. So, the goal is if you have dogs in the hate stage, project togetherness is very, very risky. And so, I encourage you to get the help of a Behaviorist before you do it. If you have dogs in the aggravate, you can move them to tolerate. Tolerate, move them to acknowledge. Acknowledge, try to move them to adore. That's the goal.

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But you've got to record keep, so I've got to ask you right now. Are you interested in having your dogs get along better? Are you committed? And if you're committed, you're going to do what I mentioned in [episode 71](#) and you will be record keeping all of this. And record keeping so that every day you can look at how things went well, because you my friend need to celebrate the work you're doing. Because maybe it's just you and your dogs working on this, especially with those of us in lockdown right now.

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And so, there isn't anybody going, "Wow. Your dogs are really getting along a lot better. Good for you." So, you need to celebrate. You need to number one, give yourself a high five. Okay. That was a little weird, but not. But write it down and go "Yeah, this is what we did today. That was awesome." And number two, you can come and, like come back to this podcast and write a comment.

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Say, "Susan, I've done this. I'll celebrate with you sister or brother. I'll do it." Because we're all in this for the good of dogs. And how great is it that we can change a dog's emotional state because that's what we're doing with the togetherness project. Oh yeah, we're teaching hand targets. That's the operant side of things, but really that's the game within the game.

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What we're really doing is conditioning the dogs to like each other, just like Sheldon was doing with Penny on the Big Bang Theory. Okay. At the time of this podcast, we are probably within a couple hundred subscribers to the [YouTube channel](#) - and I mentioned that when we get 10,000 subscribers, that I'm going to do a live on YouTube, my first ever live on YouTube. On a subject that you guys are going to choose.

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And so, in the last episode, people asked for things like how to teach a dog not to jump up. Conditioning a dog to accepting a muzzle. There's things that people wanted to see how to stop this, but don't be afraid to ask me if you've got a new puppy, we could do something, especially about puppies. How to train something. Expand your mind.





Episode: #72

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Leave me a comment here on YouTube if you would like me to teach on any particular topic because I'm pretty confident we're going to be getting to those 10,000 subscribers here on this YouTube channel before the weekend's out. Do not disappoint me.

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Come on over to YouTube, hit the like button on this video, hit the subscribe button and be sure to hit the bell so that we will notify you when we're going live and when we got another episode of Shaped by Dog. We'll see you next time.

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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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