

# Barrier Frustration: Help For Fence Fighting, Leash Reactivity and Window Guarding

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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SG Growing up in a family with six brothers, five of them older, occasionally I would get teased. And when I would go to retaliate, they would stick their big hand on my forehead, extending their arm so I couldn't get anywhere near them with my flailing arms. Creating a barrier that prevented me from expressing my emotions. And believe it or not, our dogs go through the same thing.

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It's called *barrier frustration* and that is the topic of today's podcast. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. If you're watching this on YouTube, please go ahead and hit the like button if you're interested in all I have to say about our dog's frustration.

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Barrier frustration can take many different forms. It's when the dog has some form of barrier preventing them from getting towards what they are interested in. More often than not, it's another dog and that interest can take on various forms. You might see it when you're walking your dog outside and another dog goes by and your dog starts [barking and lunging](#) towards that other dog.

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That is barrier frustration. Or you may see it when your dog is in a crate and another dog comes and start sniffing in front of their crate. They may lunge at that crate to get that other dog away. A common form of barrier frustration is when you see dogs barking and running along a fence, especially if there's another dog on the other side.

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It could happen just when people are walking by. Barrier frustration is a real thing and it's super important that you be aware of it, how to prevent it and what to do if you're seeing it in your own dog right now. First of all, why should we care? We should care because our dogs are expressing an emotion and it's our responsibility to help keep our dogs comfortable, confident, and safe.

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When they express an emotion, we can't ignore them. We've got to say, "Hang on a minute. That's anxiety and I don't like you to feel anxious. What can I do about it?" If every pet owner was aware at times their dog is showing anxiety, we wouldn't be talking about barrier frustration. What happens though is that a lot of owners don't even notice their early signs.

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So, it could be you're walking your dog down the street, they see another dog and they might say, "Oh, I'm a little bit worried about that dog. I don't know what's going on with that guy." Or they might say, "Well what's, I've never seen a dog of that color." so they might be afraid, or they might be curious, or they could just plain all be excited, "Oh my gosh! I love dogs! I want to meet you!" Either way, those emotions can't be fulfilled. And let's face it, it's not realistic that they can be fulfilled. So, a dog that's afraid might want to run and hide, but they can't. The dog that is curious might want to have a good old sniff but maybe we don't ever stop, so they can't.



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And then the dogs who are super interested, they're excited to meet another dog, if they never get to meet that other dog, they're going to express their frustration the way I did when my brothers would put their hand on my head, and I'd start yelling at them. So, the frustration is vocalized. And then sadly, a lot of times the dogs will get corrected for that.

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The dog that is running with the neighbor's dog, it might start just like, "Oh, this is fun." and it quickly will escalate. Because as I mentioned in podcast [episode number 86](#), when a dog changes their physiology, they start running, their arousal state goes up.

When a dog's arousal state goes up, they very easily could start red lining. And that's where they are so focused on the task. They're not really recognizing what they're doing.

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Why do you as a dog owner need to care about this? Because dogs that rehearse inappropriate responses get really good at those rehearsals. Just like any of us, repeat performances create really excellent performances. And this is something you don't want your dog to get good at.

Many, many years ago, I was hosting event here where many students were flying in from all over North America to train with me. Now, one young dog had a habit of this fence running with the neighbor's dog. Now the neighbor's dog happened to be a Sheltie.

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The night before the event, she was in a Airbnb with another friend's dog who was, guess what, a Sheltie. That Sheltie got excited and started barking and the trigger of the dog who was used to fence fighting who all those years could never get to the other Sheltie finally got to grab the Sheltie. And unfortunately ripped open that dog for six stitches.

So, when you allow these acts of pent-up emotion to repeat over and over again, you run the risk of when the dog gets the opportunity to act out, they will.

They might be a very friendly dog in every other situation, but over aroused state and a rehearsal of this barking and snarling and showing, acting like an aggressive dog creates the anxiety that might be acted upon when the dog gets the chance.

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The other reason that we want to eliminate these rehearsals is - what if you have another dog in your backyard? Now they might be fence running together with the dog on the other side. But somebody stops too suddenly, and this dog runs into them and all of a sudden, the anxiety and aggression gets redirected from the dog on the other side of the fence, to the dog who they know and love.

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It could easily happen. When a dog's redlining that redirection could happen at another person, maybe a kid or another dog very, very easily. So, we know we want to stop it but how? Well, the easiest way to stop boundary aggression is to never let it happen in the first place.

Here's what's going on. There is [a trigger](#). The sight of another dog walking down the street, the sound of the neighbors letting their dog outside, the jingling chain of the other dog being let out outside.



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Whatever the trigger is, it creates an emotional response in your dog. And that emotional response as I've mentioned in many, many podcast episodes here on Shaped by Dog, that emotional response has got to be dealt with. What that means is we need to focus in on the trigger. What is happening with your dog?

We want to change that trigger. Instead of them going, "Oh my gosh! I got to get that other dog", that trigger is going to mean something different like look at mom or dropping, put your head on mom's shoe. Or if you're in the backyard, when you hear that trigger, I want you to come running to the back porch. That would be brilliant, but it requires a lot of dog training.

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Circle back to the dog training and let's talk about what other options you have. Well, there's management.

Management could be you walk your dog at times when there's not a lot of dogs out. Now, what a pain in the butt that is right? Because it isn't fixing your dog's emotional state. It doesn't change those triggers that are going on in your dog's brain.

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You could also approach your neighbors and say, "Hey, I would really like to fix this with my dog. Do you mind if you just let me know when you're about to let your dog out in the morning or whenever that happens?". Now, you might not have a great relationship with your neighbor because if two dogs are fence fighting, sometimes it creates frictions with the people.

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Make sure you are approaching with a place of humbleness. You know, it's so easy to go, "If those jackass dogs didn't live next door, you know, my dog would be a really nice dog. He's just a nice dog, except for those jackass dogs. They turn him into this crazy dog." Be humble and accept full responsibility for what's going on.

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"Hey, I don't want your dogs to have to be in this anxious state so I would like to fix my dog. Would you just, you know, help me a little bit out on this one."

Now, if they say no, or they don't have the time, there's other options for you. You could stop putting your dog out in the backyard and just have them eliminate on leash in the front yard.

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Yes, management takes more time on your part. You could also put up another fence, a fence that your dog can't see-through. Now that's not going to change established triggers, you still have some dog training, but it makes a dog training a lot easier if your dog can't see the dog on the other side of that fence.

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So, management is huge. And [management is a big part of training](#) because remember we need to reduce and ideally eliminate those rehearsals of the unwanted behavior that your dog is currently showing. Whether it is in their crate, whether it's on leash, whether it is in the car. A lot of dogs will show boundary aggression through the window of a car.



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Wherever it is, we need to eliminate those rehearsals while we're creating a new trigger for the dog. And for me, I think the best trigger is orienting to you. And so, I personally think that having your dog on a [head halter](#) will be a massive help for you in this instance. Whether you're working in the backyard, you're walking down leash, you're walking your dog on leash and on the street, or you're working in the car.

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You want to create an alternate behavior for your dog. And if they do show aggression with a head halter, you can just turn their head and get them out of the area so that they can come down below threshold. So, the goal when training is to keep your dog below threshold. So that might mean take your dog out where you know there's another dog that you can walk to that is on the other side of the fence.

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Now you want your dog to know that dogs are gonna bark at you and that's okay. And so, stay far away so your dog doesn't get triggered. And as soon as the dog sees the dog, you're going to stop. Ideally, you're a long way away and your dog is going to look at you like, "Why are we stopped?" And you're going to click and you're going to reward them. Or you're going to say "Good." and then you're going to reward them.

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We want the dog when you're in the vicinity of another dog, orient to me, and I'm going to reinforce that as something that is amazing. Now, if you're doing this in the backyard with your dog, you could start on the far side of the fence, way, way away from the problem neighbor dog. And when the dog looks at you, you're going to do exactly the same thing, mark and reward the dog.

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Now, if this dog has a history of going cray cray with the neighbor's dog, they might not ever orient to you. In that case, I would create a new game away from the neighbor's dog. So, it would look like this. I would start with *Crate Games*. I'm going to put the link in the show notes here how you can [get Crate Games Online](#).

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With *Crate Games* we have a part of the behavior where we released the dog from the crate with a release word. "Break" is my dogs release word. And the game is called *Yer Out - Yer In*. So, if I release you and I stand beside the crate, you should come out and go, "Oh, we're playing again!" and jive right back in.

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So, I would start by playing some *Yer Out - Yer In*. Then I go around with the dog on leash to various dog beds around the house and stand near the dog bed. Dog goes in, you're going to give them a high value reward and then give them the release cue "break". They come out, you can get them a low value reward and wait. They jumped back in that dog bed, it's another high value reward.

You're going to do this around the house. Now they may get to a point where your dog says, "I get a really good treats when I stay in this bed and only the crappy ones when I get out."



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So, they're going to stop getting out of the bed. You're going to just switch the values of the rewards so that when they release from the bed, you're going to give them the high value reward. And then when they go back then you give them the lower value reward. Do that for a few and then you can just mix it up so that you get the dog going both ways super easy.

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Now I would take that behavior and play at every threshold of the doors in your house or apartment. So, you might walk up to the door and put your hand on the doorknob and say something like "doorframe", it means nothing, but the dog is going to look at you because they've never heard that word before. And what I want them to understand is you only ever have to sit at these doors inside the house when I say the word "doorframe".

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So, you're going to say doorframe, put your hand on the door and wait till your dog offers a sit. If you've just done a bunch of them in their Hot Zone, they're probably going to want to offer a sit. Feed them, open the door, say "break", and then just—the dogs on leash so when they go through, you're going to not move and they're going to go, "Oh", and they're going to come right back in again. And you're going to give them a lot of cookies.

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Right. So, when I'm giving them a lot of cookies, I'm going to say something like "Winners Circle!" and give them a lot of cookies. If I give them just one cookie, I don't say anything. I might say "good", give them a cookie. But if they hear "Winners Circle", I'm going to put a lot of cookies. I might put them on the floor and point to them. "Winners Circle, get them! Winners Circle, get them!"

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Right. And then I'm going to play that game with every door of my house. I want to change the trigger for when my dog was outside. So now I'm going to practice it out the front door when my dog gets really good, I'm going to say "doorframe", release the dog, say "Winners Circle", they come back in.

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Eventually you can drop the word doorframe for outside doors. When your dogs going outside, what I want them to do is when they go outside, they turn around and orient to me. So that way you can go in your backyard together. You've set your dog up with a Winners Circle. Now we can take that dog off leash.

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Ideally, you're going to do this when the other dogs not around. But if they go to their fence, you're just going to wait until they orient back to you and you're going to say, "Guess what? Winners Circle." "Cookies all over the ground. Go crazy." Play that a lot without the dog in the backyard.

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So now we've established, if you look at the neighbor's fence and then oriented me it's going to be a Winners Circle. When you ask the neighbor to bring their dogs back, make sure your Winners Circle is [crazy high value rewards](#), the best cookies, the best cheese, the best chunks of meat that your dog would ever want.



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The other dog is out there. Your dog is off leash. And you're going to wait. They orient, you're going to say, "Winners Circle", cookie. I would use a clicker for this one when the other dog's out. Click, cookies on the ground. Now they may come in and eat some. They might turn back to the other dog and growl and run and bite or bark. It's got to be okay.

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What we want them to do is see you there and you can even keep, you know, backing away to the other side of your backyard. You're going to wait and if after five minutes you get zero more orientation, well that's fine. You know, you can go in and interrupt by standing right at the fence so that you're a barrier that the dog's going to have to go around or just go back in the house.

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If there's a chance your dog might redirect at you, don't go near them. Just go back in the house and go back and play your doorframe game and Winners Circle game all around the house and in your empty backyard. And then the next time you're going to try it, you're going to try it with your dog on leash, on their head halter.

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All right. The goal is for the dog to see the other dog and to orient to you. But you're going to say "Susan, well I'm not in the backyard when my dog is doing this." Well, this is one of the most important management points in all of this. You don't turn your dog loose in the backyard. If there's a chance they're going to fence run, you need to go out with your dog.

You're going to establish that the backyard is for you to go to the bathroom or for you and I to train. And if you're not, you know, I let my dogs out it takes literally one minute for five dogs to do what they have to do at first thing in the morning and then they all come right back in the house.

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Right. We're in the backyard to do something, not look at what's going on over the neighbor's fence. Change your dog's emotional trigger. Teach them to orient towards you. And if this is still a little overwhelming for you, please, any kind of boundary aggression is not something that you should take lightly.

I would strongly advise you getting the help of an expert dog Behaviorist that will help create those better triggers for your dog so the anxiety and the stress that they are currently feeling can be eliminated. That's it for Shaped by Dog. I'll see you next time.

### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 86: How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 29: Understanding and Preventing Reactivity and Aggression in Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 40: Using a Head Halter on a Dog, Why My Approach is so Different](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

[Podcast Episode 59: Why Your Treats Aren't Working for Your Dog](#)

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

[Video Blog: Understanding Your Dog's Triggers](#)



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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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- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
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