

Excited Or Suspicious Dog? Dealing With Your Dog's Emotions

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG I have a question for you. When you feel emotional, are you at your best? I mean, do you make the best decision for yourself or your future? Probably not, right? And neither do our dogs, yet they're expected to most of the time. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today we're going to talk about the emotions your dog can and cannot possess.

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I'm going to share with you what happens when your dog gets too emotional to actually respond to you and what you should do about it. But first I'm going to share a story. Now, this is one of those stories from my past that is incredibly vivid, like I can remember it with great detail, yet it happened 45 years ago.

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I was 15 years old, and it was in the middle of a bitter cold Canadian winter. My BFF Sylvia - you know who you are if you're listening - we were going for a walk late one Friday evening. Now we probably shouldn't have been out. It was dark and we walked, there was a new coffee shop we were going to go and get a hot chocolate.

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It was about a mile walk and I was wearing beige corduroy pants. I know that, and that's important. And I'll come back in a minute. Now, Sylvia and I were both wearing what was in fad back in the day in the mid seventies, these bomber jackets. And they just came to your waist and they had this big hood with fur around the face and it was cold, so we're all hunkered down.

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And we were walking along one of the busiest streets in Hamilton, where I was born and raised. And we were about a mile away from home, almost at the coffee shop and Sylvia sees a car parked on the side of the road, the guy was asleep in his car. She goes "look, this guy is asleep. I'm going to slam on his door and wake him up."

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I said, "Don't do that." Like the poor guy is asleep in the middle of winter. Let him. I don't know how he does it. It was bitter cold. It was like minus 30. And she said, "No, no, no. It's going to be fun." She slams on the car door and then she takes off. Now I didn't share with you that Sylvia was scouted by the Canadian Olympic team. She was like a world class athlete. She was five foot nine. I am five foot two. Back then I was almost five foot two.

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So, Sylvia is gone like the wind. And I start running as fast as my little eggbeater legs can go. And then I thought I didn't do anything. I'm not going to run. So, I stopped running. Sylvia is gone. And I kind of looked in my peripheral vision. I see this guy running, like he's almost caught up to me and I'm like, "Holy crap!" So, I screamed and started running as fast as I could. And I actually ran faster than I have ever run at any point in my life before or after. I took off across the street. It was a red light.



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And I didn't even notice I ran across the red-light. Cars were screeching and honking, and I could have been killed. I ran into traffic on a very busy road. That's when Sylvia looked back and saw me because of all the cars screeching and honking. And I was running as this guy lunged for me and he grabbed me by the hood, pulled back my hood as Sylvia was yelling, and he could tell that we were girls and he stopped.

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He just thought we were a couple of punks and he headed back to his car. Now what I didn't realize, and here's where the corduroy comes back into play was during that brief moment of time, I completely expressed my bladder. Remember I said it was a bitter cold February night. So that corduroy was turned into sheets of ice and my legs were so chapped by the time we walked that mile, back to my home.

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Now, what if in the midst of that my mother said, "Well, didn't you stop because the light was red?" or "Didn't you look both ways before you cross the street?", those thoughts didn't actually cross my mind. I have never in my life ever been so afraid before or after that point. You know, it's not something that I would normally do. And I've never done anything like that ever again and I was terrified.

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So, no, I didn't stop to notice the light was red or stop to notice there were cars going, because what happens when you're afraid is that your physiological system changes. The blood goes to your extremities to allow you to run as fast as you can. Your focus narrows to that which is important. And if somebody yelled "Stop! Look out, there's a car!" I never would have heard them because I was running for my life.

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Now let's bring it all back to our dogs. A few years ago, I shared on my blog something I called the [wheel of fun](#), something like that. And it was a bunch of emotions that I feel dogs have. And I want to share with you an updated version of that, kind of like a wheel of dog's emotions. First of all, people think that dogs have all the same emotions that we do, and they don't. Dogs' emotional capabilities is somewhere around a two-year-old human's capabilities, in that they are definitely capable of a lot of emotions, but not a lot of the ones that people think they are.

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Like shame, guilt, remorse, resentment or bitter. People have all these conjured up ideas. If their dog happens to go to the bathroom on their carpet, that they were being spiteful, and yeah dogs aren't capable of all of that. Let's look at what they are capable of though. Think of a dog chillaxin in your living room, in their bed. And let's call that state neutral where the dog is comfortable.

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Now they can go to the right or to the left on my wheel. So, let's assume that you are walking through the house and your comfortable dog sees you or hears you pick up a set of car keys and that comfortable state immediately goes to interested. And they might get out of the bed and start following you because, "Hey, I like car rides." So, they're interested. Now, if you then go and grab their Frisbee, now they're happy. You might see the tail start going, and their ears are on the top of their head.



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And if you go back to podcast [episode number 4](#), you can recognize all the T-E-E-M-P of the dog's body. They're telling you what their emotions are. Once you get towards the car, they might start vocalizing and whining because they've gone from happy up to the next stage, excited. And when they're driving in the car, that excitement gets amped up and amped up. And maybe when you go out to play some frisbee, they have now officially red lined.

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They are overexcited. They are at a state where their focus is narrow. They don't know what they're doing. And then you go to throw the frisbee and they might jump up and bite you in the hand accidentally. You might get bit because they're so focused on the game. They're so overexcited that they just make a lunge for the frisbee, and they might get you. Or let's say another dog comes by and normally if they meet other dogs, they're fine.

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But they might turn and just snap at that other dog, because they're so focused on this game. So red lining is if you go back to [episode number 86](#), where I talked about the arousal curve, red lining is a dog who is so overexcited, they actually are over aroused, and they can't think properly. Now let's go to the other side of that circle.

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Now, here we have a dog, let's say they're walking down the street and they're neutral. They're comfortable. "I'm walking. I'm not really thinking of anything. Uh, you know, I like walking with my mom. Everything's cool." And then they see possibly another dog up ahead. And they're not sure if it's a dog so they're cautiously curious.

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"I don't know if I know, is that a dog?" So, they're maybe not going to be wagging their tail as much. They're going to be alerted. And then they go, "Okay. Yeah, that actually is a dog." And so, they go from cautiously curious to suspicious and here they might start a little bit of a growl. "I'm not sure about this. What's going on up there?"

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Then this dog might look back at them. Now they're worried. So, they go into a state of being anxious. Now the dog gets closer. Now what if that dog maybe starts posturing towards them? Now they go from anxious to afraid. And when they're afraid they are red lining, but when they're anxious, just like a dog who's really excited they're getting very, very close to red lining.

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And so, if you take a dog in that state and they growl, maybe it doesn't have to be a dog, it could be a child that they see. And at first, they're going "Oh, what's that? I've never seen a little human before." They're cautiously curious. And then the little human starts moving in these really weird fanatic ways.

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And now they're suspicious. "Well, that's not normal. I've never seen anything move like that." And now the child starts squealing and now they're anxious. They might open most of their eye.



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You can see the whites of their eyes. They start to stress panic. Now, if that child comes near them, they might get afraid. And if they're anxious they might've started growling at the kid or the other dog. And if you said "Hey! Don't do that. You sit! What are you doing?" They're probably not going to sit just like the dog who's red lining if you ask them to sit. They're not going to sit, just like me running for my life.

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If you just said, "stop and look both ways". I'm not going to hear you say stop and look both ways. Because when that dog is afraid their emotions are saying, "you just have to act, you can't process any information that's coming into your brain". And so, people will look at this dog and go, "You're not listening!" and they'll get mad at the dog.

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Or they'll say "You're being spiteful. You're being stubborn. You're looking at that dog. And you wanted that dog, you're being stubborn. You're not listening to me." Emotions paralyze your dog. Remember, do you believe like I believe that our dogs always do the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment that we're asking them to perform?

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If you believe that, then you aren't going to get angry at your dog when they say, "I can't". You might look around and go "There's nothing to be afraid of. It's just a dog. You've seen dogs before." Just like I've said previously on this podcast that reinforcement is in the brain of the learner. Any other emotion, like fear, is in the brain of the learner.

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It's not up to us to say what our dog should and shouldn't be afraid of. It's them telling us with their body what they are afraid of. And it's our responsibility to acknowledge that and go, "Hey buddy, I got your back." And so, when your dog is either red lining because they're way too excited or they're over aroused because they're paralyzed with fear, the first thing you need to do is turn towards your dog and get them out of that environment.

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You need to retreat to an area where the stimulus that they are responding to is not nearby, so that they can respond. So, if your dog knows you always throw frisbees at the baseball diamond and you ask them to sit and they can't, I would retreat and turn further away from the baseball diamond and maybe back towards the car and ask them to sit. So, wherever your dog is showing you 'I can't respond', I might ask them a second time.

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But if it's obvious to me, because I saw the dog going from neutral, comfortable to going to cautiously curious and then getting to suspicious I might go, "Okay, what is around here that might have gotten you a little bit aroused?" And I'm going to listen to my dog when they tell me with their body, what they're feeling. Now the dog that red lines, I sometimes refer to this as TAR, they're too aroused to respond. I see that in my own Border Collies. If they are around something they love, like Border Collies who love sheep.



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They get locked in on what their job is, and you could say, "sit, down, stand" and unless they have a history of learning how to respond in times where sheep are around and they're excited, they won't be able to do it. They're just too aroused to respond. That's what happens when they're red lining. There's no sense getting mad at them.

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"You should know this. You should know better. I know you know this. You've done this at home. You're just blowing me off." Believe the dog. They can only tell you with their body language, but you've got to believe them. They're always doing the best they can with the education we've given them, in the environment we've asked them to perform.

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And it's our duty as their advocate to say, "Hey buddy, I guess I haven't given you enough education to deal with this right now." My puppy who is a year-old, last week I took her for a walk in the woods and she's always walked with Tater. Well, she was by herself for the first time and three times she came upon another dog, and she reacted badly.

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And I didn't say, "Knock it off. You've done this before with Tater. You can do this on your own." I believed her. Believe your dog, they'll never gonna lie to you. And in the end, you'll be able to help build that relationship you have with your dog, help build the trust they have in you so that they know you will have their back.

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And eventually they will be able to perform in an environment that you've put them in because you've grown that trust and that reinforcement history so that they know that they don't have to worry about whatever it is that's got them [triggered](#) at that moment. Think about any time you thought your dog was being spiteful, willful, or stubborn, think back and now ask yourself, "Could they have been red lining? Could they have just been afraid?"

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Let me know what you think. If you're watching this on YouTube, go ahead and leave me a comment. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Video Blog: Where Is Your Dog On The Circle Of Fun?](#)

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

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

[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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