

Consent In Dog Training: The Misuse, Misunderstanding And Misapplication

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG The idea of getting consent to train your dog is really growing in popularity and with really good reason. However, the misunderstanding, misuse, or misapplication of this concept is really messing up some dogs and causing some massive setbacks for them and their owners. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. And today we're going to dig into what really is consent in dog training and how best can we benefit and our dogs benefit by us using it?

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By definition consent is giving permission for something to happen or an agreement to do something. This idea really came from the marine mammal and zoo world where, let's face it they had to train consent because let's say we've got to take a blood draw from a killer whale. If he doesn't want you to do that, it's not happening.

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And so, without training an animal to be compliant and say, "I'm liking this, this is good. We can do this all day long." what they had to do was actually beach that whale by completely emptying the tank in order to get a blood sample.

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Consent training is often called cooperative care. And it's something that I've included in my dog training since the mid-nineties, but I've called it the game on position. Now this game on position could be in one of two distinctly different categories. One would be general dog training where I've taught games like [ItsYerChoice](#) or [Crate Games](#), or do you want to [wear your head halter](#)?

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All of these things require the dog to do something to tell me they want to continue. Now, the other area is the area of health where I've asked the dog to show me I have permission to do something like brush them or brush their teeth or trim their nails.

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So, two different areas, both involving my dog saying, "Yes, we can do this.", or "No, I don't really feel comfortable with you doing that." So, these two categories of training, health and general training are covered by three distinctly different ways for my dog to show consent.

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The first one *expressed consent*. That's where the dog will show me by something they do that I have permission to carry on with what I'm doing. For example, my dog will flop on her side, put her head on the ground and stay there telling me she's okay with me trimming her nails. Expressed consent.

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The second area is *implied consent*. Now that's where you might pick up a set of keys and your dog starts dancing back and forth to the door knowing you're going out in the car. They might be like spinning and barking and singing the songs of their people because they're so excited. It's implied.



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They have consent. They're giving you consent to take them for a car ride. Generally speaking, in anything I want my dog to do in any part of training, I want them to show me implied consent. I want a dog to walk to the start line in agility showing me as I talked about in [episode number four](#), their T.E.M.P. that I know their body is saying, "Yes, I want to do agility. Yes, you have permission to lead out. Come on, game on. Let's go." I want it to be so clear by the joy of my dogs that anything I want them to do with me I've got their implied consent.

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Now the third category is that of *substitute consent*. Now that's where I as a dog owner have to override my dog and not wait for consent when the area of safety is concern. For example, when Swagger was rehabbing from a shoulder injury, he had to spend a lot of time in an ex-pen. Well, one day he got his arm caught at the top of the ex-pen and he was screaming and panicking while I just jumped into the ex-pen and grabbed him and pushed him forward to help him unpin that arm.

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I didn't get consent. Was it okay for me to move in? It was substituted consent. I just went all in doing what I had to do to help my dog. Now, there is a fourth area of consent that I've seen in dog training, and it's not one that I would ever do. But it's what I've called *manufactured consent*.

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That's where I'll see people lure their dog into position or push their head down or maybe they open the door really slowly and putting a hand in their dog's face so they don't bolt out or maybe put their leg across the doorway so their dog can't get out. They're manufacturing what they think is consent and maybe it works in their mind but really and truly you want to aim to one of those first two areas, expressed or implied consent.

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Now you might ask "Susan, why do we need consent anyway?" Well, if we want to train our dogs with kindness, we want them to be part of this journey. We want to give a voice to the voiceless. We want them to say, "Yes, I'm on board. This is good." Now yes you can just bully your way and force your dog to do what you want, but you wouldn't be listening to this podcast if that's something you wanted to do.

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Our goal ultimately is for our dog to say "Yes, please" or "No, thank you" to us. And yeah, we do want them to say "No, thank you". We want to know we need to know that they are okay with what we're doing and you're going to see why as we move further on in this podcast. Now, my observation is that the reason a dog may say "No, thank you" to a person would fall into one of four categories.

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The first is they just don't see value in doing what you're asking them to do. So, if a dog walks away from training they're saying, "No value in there for me." And they're just saying, "No, I don't want to do it." Maybe you walk your dog into the agility ring. You set them up in front of the jump and they start sniffing and walk away. They're saying, "No, thank you. Don't want to." The second reason a dog may say no is competing value. Let's say you would like your dog to walk off leash and go through the backyard and they see a squirrel and they say, "No, I can't walk off leash. No, thank you. I am going to chase that squirrel." All right.



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That's an emphatic no by the decision the dog made. They are seeing a value in the environment that's higher than what you are presenting to them and they're exiting stage left. Now the next reason would be emotional discomfort. Let's say you have a dog who's terrified of what's going on and you say, "Would you like to go and do agility?" "No! No, I'm very worried about what's going on in this environment. There're dogs, there're tall people. I don't want to." They have emotional discomfort and they're telling you no.

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The other thing you might see is eustress where the dog is so excited to do what they want that you might say, "Ah, we're going to go swimming. Would you, could you sit first?" "No!" The dog's just vibrating. "I can't, I can't. I can't!" Because it's eustress. It's super excitement for what's going on. And they can't offer the permission or the game on position that you are asking for.

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Now, the fourth category would be physical discomfort. And that might be a dog is in acute pain and you ask them to do something, and they go "Really? I can't, I physically can't do it." The other is that the dog is malaise. They maybe aren't just feeling so good. They're showing you a little malaise. They're just "No, I got an upset stomach." So those are the four categories of reasons that I've observed that a dog may say no to their owner for whatever reason.

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Now here is the critical part of this podcast. This is where things go wrong for people is what happens when the dog says no. Now one school of thought or what I've observed people doing is when the dog says no, they just go, "Okay, you've made a decision. I'm going to reinforce you so that you know you always have that right to say no. And we're going to leave the environment." Now I have a problem with that approach for two reasons. Number one I believe what B.F. Skinner made very popular that reinforcement builds behavior.

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And if a dog offers a behavior and you reinforce it time and time again, you are going to find that they're going to make that same choice over and over again. The second problem I have with this is dogs like people have a comfort zone. "I'm happy in my little comfort zone. Now what you are asking me to do is maybe outside of that comfort zone."

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And if they say no, and we say okay, we never grow that comfort zone. So, a dog who may have a little bit of fear or anxiety stays in that world with fear or anxiety because we never do anything but reinforce them for saying no. So, you might be saying, "Well Susan are you then saying your dogs have no right to say no to you?" No, that's not what I'm saying. What I do is my dogs have the right to say no, but in most cases I will ask the question 'should I be trying to turn this no into a yes?'. I'll show you what I mean. So, let's go back to that dog that says, "I don't see any value in walking on a loose leash.", or "I don't see any value in going to the start line in agility."



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What the dog is telling you, if you go back to [episode number 57](#) here on Shaped by Dog is that they don't have D.A.S.H. The D of dash is the desire. And that's the first thing that we should get before we train our dogs. And when the dog is saying, "Yeah, I'm showing you expressed consent because I'm super excited and I really want to do whatever it is you want to do." then we train the A, the accuracy.

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And that dog's accuracy coupled with their desire creates speed. And then we move that around to different habitats and they generalize that behavior implied consent can be seen everywhere. Now, if your dog is saying no just because they don't see the value, they're telling you that maybe you've added too much complexity before they really had D.A.S.H.

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If you believe like I do that our dogs are always doing the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment that we're asking them to perform and they say no, then we've got to look at the job we've done. So, what would I do if my dog said no because they didn't see the value?

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I would number one go "Hmm. I've got some work to do." because value is grown in layers. Has there been a transfer of value from what my dog loves to what I want them to do in the base layer? Now what if your dog sits in front of that first jump and then they start going over the second one they say, "Yeah I see some value in this." but they're walking. In my opinion that's not giving you an implied permission to keep going.

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They are saying, "I still don't see a great deal of value in this." What would I do then? I would pull the dog back. I would do something simple. Like, can you do a hand touch? Can you do a spin? Can you do a down? Can you chase me out of the ring? As I run to your crate, play some Crate Games, throw you in there, pull up my journal and say, where have I gone wrong? And how can I start training my dog better? What are the layers I missed? And I would not be going back to agility for a very, very long time.

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Okay. What if my dog says, there's competing values here? "Look, there's kids on bicycles and I'm so excited. I can't possibly stay sit when you asked me to sit." We need to as I said in [episode number 24](#), when you're dealing with any kind of distractions, minimize the distractions so that the dog can do what we've asked. So, I want to turn that "No, I can't" in to a "Well yeah, I can do that". And we're going to do that by all the steps I said in that episode, most importantly get the dog out of the environment and then re-ask your question.

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What if my dog says there's some emotional stress here? "I am really fearful of this environment." Well, you want to turn a no into a yes, but it may not happen right there. What you're going to do is get your dog away from where they're showing emotional distress. Now let's say the dog is in flat-out fear. They're way over threshold there, nothing good is going to come from this today. You are not going to get a reinforcement. They're not going to take your reinforcement if they're in flat out fear.



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Get them out of the environment, get your journal out and go, 'How can I work on counterconditioning and desensitization to eliminate that which is my dog is showing fear to'. Now what if it is eustress? What if they're just so excited they can't do what you're asking. The exact same thing. Go to [episode number 103](#), where I talked about when your dog has to arouse to respond and start with the application.

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So, you're normalizing yes when you are really excited, you can still be thoughtful and drive. That's the ultimate goal for a dog who's showing eustress today. Now what about my dog who's showing physical pain, Susan? Surely you don't want my dog to turn that into a yes if my dog is in pain. Maybe, what if we're trying to cut our dog's nails and that pain may be "It feels weird to me".

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It's like on a scale of 1 to 10, it's like a 0.0001. It's a little bit of discomfort. I'm going to work at turning that no to a yes by my strategic use of reinforcement. Number one to classically condition a better response and number two to grow that dog's value by generalizing and desensitizing any discomfort they may have.

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All right. Now, if my dog is in acute pain, like I'm doing something and all of a sudden, they yelp and go, "Oh my Gosh! Uh." I'm never trying to turn that no into a yes. I'm always going to be the best advocate for my dog and say, "Hey, thank you. We are out of here." Right. But what if my dog is saying, "I don't feel well, there's a little malaise here." The answer to that is it depends.

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I'll give you an example. Just this week, I took my puppy This! to a dog training class about an hour away. And for whatever reason she was [car sick in the car](#). Hasn't happened in months but for whatever reason it happened. So, I got into the classroom, and you could tell she was not happy.

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And so, I let her sit and settle and then I didn't go "Here's our first exercise." It was jump, tunnel, jump. I didn't go. "Okay. You've had five minutes. Let's get out there and try a jump, tunnel, jump." No. I took the lowest level of connection between us. I got her out and I said, "Hey, do you want to chase me?" And I pushed her back.

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I played a little Recaller game. And lo and behold "Yeah, I do want to chase you. Okay." "Now, do you want to jump off your front feet and hand touch?" Because that takes some effort that if you had an upset stomach, you wouldn't be able to do. If she didn't chase me, I would have said "Thank you. We're going to watch for another half hour and maybe we'll try this again."

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But if she did chase me, I just go to the next step. "Can you hand touch?" And she hand touch and I said "Do you want to tug with me?" And there was absolutely implied consent growling while she's tugging. And I'm like, "Thank you. And now we're going to try this sequence." All right.



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So, whenever I get a no, I want to grow that comfort zone and so I'm going to evaluate what can I do right now or what can I plan to do in the future to turn that no into a yes. Now let's look at some of the husbandry that I do with my dogs. I want to clean my dog's teeth. And for that, I have them put their paws up on a little step. Now, if I get the toothbrush and I say paws up and they put their paws up, that is expressed consent that I can now put my hand on their lips and pull their teeth up.

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And if they hold that position, that's implied consent that I can start brushing. And if they don't move their head that's implied consent, we can keep brushing. You see what I mean? Same with things like I use a chin rest to condition my dog that sometimes some people might examine you, be a Veterinarian or a Technician.

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When you hold your head in my palm, you're giving consent for any examination to happen. And I practice This! by teaching her to put her head on a footstool where that her holding her head while I manipulate her limbs is giving me consent or in the future, maybe a Veterinarian consent to carry on.

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Likewise, when I want to trim my dog's nails, she flops on her side and keeps her head down. If she lifts up her head she's saying, "I don't know about this." And I'll give her a few seconds and she'll immediately put that head back down saying, "Yeah, game on. Let's go. Game on, I'm liking this." The consent allows me to grow her nail trimming so that I can grind her nails. I can cut her nails with nail trimmers, whenever I want.

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It's grown because we start with trust, and I never break that trust. That's how I get that expressed consent. And in everything that I want to do with my dog grows into implied consent. Now, if you would like to know more about how I get that implied consent to trim my dog's nails, I'd like you to jump over to YouTube and leave a comment on the YouTube video.

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That way I know there's enough interest for people to know how I've grown this game on position to cut my dog's nails. That's it for today, big podcast. I hope you understand it. And so now what I'd like for you to do is look at your own dog training and see where you have expressed consent that you would like to turn to all out, 'HE double hockey sticks yeah! I'm in game on implied consent'.

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Because anything we're doing with the dog as a team, whether it just be pet dog behaviors or sport behavior, that's the kind of consent that we should be getting from our dogs. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog. I hope I have a better voice by then.





Episode: #106

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Resources:

[Learn How to Play ItsYerChoice](#)

[Crate Games Online](#)

[Podcast Episode 40: Using A Head Halter On A Dog, Why My Approach Is So Different](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 57: Why Balance Breaks Fast Track Your Dog Training](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 79: Reduce Anxiety and Grow Your Dog's Confidence with These Pro Dog Training Tips](#)

[Podcast Episode 24: Help for the Dog who Chases Chipmunks, Bicycles, and the Neighbor's Cat](#)

[Podcast Episode 103: Excited Or Suspicious Dog? Dealing With Your Dog's Emotions](#)

[Podcast Episode 75: Stop Motion Sickness: Helping Your Puppy or Dog Love the Car](#)



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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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