

Help Your Excited Dog Calm Down And Stop Barking, Lunging, Spinning, Nipping

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG If you've ever thought to yourself "Man, I can't wait until this dog just calms down and learns to listen to me." Or you've been embarrassed because of your dog's behavior when you're trying to walk them, and they see a distraction and they act like they can't even hear you. Or maybe they're spinning and bouncing off the windows when you're driving in the car because they're so excited about where you're going.

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If any of that sounds like you then you my friend may have an over aroused dog. Today we're going to talk about exactly what that means and what you can do about it. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And over aroused dogs often get a bad rap. You know, they're blamed for a lot of things in life because people think they're just not listening when in fact, they're really misunderstood.

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I did a previous podcast on the over aroused dog. You'll want to check that one out. [Podcast episode 110](#). But today we're going to do a deep dive into things like, what does the over aroused dog look like and how that dog may have come about to be that way and most importantly, what you can do about it right now?

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So, an over aroused dog or an over excited dog or a hyper dog or whatever one label that people give these dogs, it isn't a barrier of age. It could be a ten-year old dog. It could be a seven-month-old dog. It's a dog that's just plain out of control. They may be barking and lunging and spinning. They might have an open mouth bark.

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They may nip at you. And a lot of target areas would be like the inside of your arm or the inside of your thigh. If you are trying to maybe get the dog to hand touch they'll often nip with their incisors, the front teeth. They just grab the skin of your hand with their front teeth. They'll be vocalizing and often it will be a high-pitched vocalization.

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When you're trying to give them a treat, they're very grabby with their treats. They are over aroused. Some dogs when they get super excited, especially herding breeds, they freeze, and they may get really, really slow in their actions. If you ask them to sit, they might get super slow, and they may just lock up and act again like they just can't hear you.

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What you're seeing in all of these dogs is the representation of an emotional state. Remember in past episodes when we talked about [dogs in their emotional states](#), I said you can't dog train emotions. You can condition emotions, but you can't dog train that. So, when a dog is acting emotionally, they're in their back brain, they're not in their thinking brain.



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Now, just picture yourself being emotional. Like you're in the middle of a heated discussion. You might get a little emotional. If somebody says, "Why don't you just calm down a little bit.", does that really help? Or what about when you decide you're going to jump out of a perfectly good plane and parachute for the first time yet you're afraid of heights. Or you're going to stand up and talk in front of people but you're really an introvert.

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Imagine the flood of stress hormones that would go through you. And would they allow you to do your best? Highly unlikely. Especially if it's one of the first times you've tried it. So that's what happens with these over aroused dogs. They're flooded with adrenaline and honestly a lot of the times they can't respond in the moment that you're talking to them.

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So, when we have these over aroused dogs, a lot of people will give you what I feel is bad advice because I personally don't think there's a blanket therapy for all of these dogs. So, some people will say, "You've got to just correct them. You've got to let them know, Hey, Hey, Hey, Hey, they've got to knock that off."

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And again, you're correcting an animal's emotional state. Some people will say, "Well that dog just needs more exercise." But actually, if you get that dog who's super excited because maybe you're doing sports with them and they see water or they see the agility field and you go, "Oh yeah, I'm just going to do a few extra hours a day of exercise."

What you're going to have is a dog who is still super excited but they're very fit so they can be excited for longer.

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So, I'm not saying don't exercise, but I'm saying that alone is not your answer. And if you're already giving your dog adequate exercise don't add to that thinking you're going to help your hyper dog. Now, other people will go in the opposite direction and say, "We need to get this dog to be calm. And we need to teach that dog that they must not get excited. They must be calm in all instances of life."

And honestly, I think that's being disrespectful to the dog. Just like if the thought of standing up in front of 20,000 people sends chills down your spine in a very bad way and for me standing up and talking in front of 30,000 people is exciting and I'd be like, "bring it on."

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The difference is you're talking in front of 30,000 people might be you being a square peg and that being your round hole. And likewise for some dogs trying to create perfect calm in all situations, that's trying to get your square peg in a round hole. Now I'm not saying calm isn't part of the solution, but it isn't a panacea for everything.

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Now, another piece of really bad advice is people say, "You've got to flood the dog. You've got to just put them right in the middle of what's challenging them and just make them stay there until they calm down." Flooding is, I just can't think of an example that I would use where flooding works.



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So again, there might be some of the suggestions that I have for you in my top 10 things that I do with dogs that are over excited or over aroused. It may sound a little bit like each of those pieces of advice, but it is very different and it's taking in context and together with a protocol.

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Now, my experience with over aroused dogs, I have coached and trained sport dogs. And guess what? A lot of the sport dogs, sports like flyball that I competed at the highest sport, setting world records multiple times over a series of 10 years. Agility, where I won world championships at the elite of the sport. I know about over aroused dogs. I know how they present, and I know the mistakes people make, because guess what guys, I've made them myself.

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So, we've got this dog who is acting out emotionally. Here's the worst thing that people do. Number one is they get tense themselves, and they try to hover over the dog. They try to control the dog, right? Like the person saying "you've got to calm down". Maybe they put their hands on you when you're getting excited. "You got to calm down." "Don't you! Don't you tell me who I have to be!" Okay, so hovering over the dog. They get all their muscles tight.

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They may actually then try to yell at the dog or a scold them and tell them, "No! You've got to stop that!" Or worse yet they might correct the dog, give them a collar correction or scold the dog. All of that is like putting gasoline on a fire. And you'll know why when I share with you some of the reasons why dogs are over aroused or over excited. Because in many, I would say the vast majority of times, it's not the dog's fault.

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So, let's go to why. Why are some dogs just prone to go off? They just go off at the silliest things and other dogs are like, "What's wrong with you, Jack?" Number one would be genetics, because let's face it, there are some breeds that are higher drive dogs. I happen to like the higher drive dogs. The Jack Russell Terrier and the Border Collies.

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There are dogs that just love to go all day. And if you've picked one of those breeds as your family pet and you don't like to go all day, then you may be overwhelmed thinking, "Okay, this is crazy talk. This isn't what I signed up for." So, you really have to research the breed that you're getting. I'm not saying all dogs within a breed are the same. There's definitely individual characteristics within a breed.

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For example, this book the **Frustration Theory**, it's by *Abram Amsel* and it discussed how each one of us, including dogs, is born with a certain response to frustration.

One of four responses either we get invigorated, think of like putting a dollar in the pop machine and you hit your favorite cola and it comes out empty. So, you might be one of the people who is your immediate response is invigoration or rage. "I'm going to shake you, I'm going to get my pop back!" The second response is suppression. So, you may be one of those people like, "Hmm, I guess there's nothing in there." And you walk away. You may be one of those people that have the response of persistent.



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“Well, I put a dollar in, and I didn't get my cola, but I see there's another drink that I might like to try.” And you might put another dollar in to try a different type. Maybe there's a different one that's available. Or maybe you'll go and find somebody to help you out.

Or you may be the fourth type, which is regression. And with somebody who's response to frustration is regression, you would go back to what worked the first time. So, you might put another dollar in and hit the same thing.

You know, with our dogs if they tried something and we are trying to raise a criteria for them and they don't get reinforced, they might go back to the last thing they did that was reinforcing.

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Now here's the good news. Everyone's born with one of those four innate responses to frustration, but we can help change that response. It's nurture and nature. So, for example, I was raised with six brothers, and I think I've got pretty good persistency because I was raised with six brothers. And I don't know if I came by it naturally, but I sure have it now. And I sure did get frustrated being raised with six brothers. So, genetics plays a big role in if a dog is hyper or over aroused or not.

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For example, my Border Collies would be far more naturally excitable than my Bulldog Cross. However, guess what, my Bulldog Cross is actually more over aroused than my Border Collies in some situations. And I will get to that because this might be your dog.

Number two reason is diet. So, depending on what you're feeding dogs. There's a lot of pre-made dog food that's got a lot of carbohydrates in which turns into sugars which gives your dogs this hyper energy.

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Dyes. There's a lot of food dyes in it or chemicals that creates a response in the dog that they just can't control themselves. So, I'm going to put a link in the show notes, if you're watching this on YouTube, in the description where you can [download some of my favorite recipes](#) that you can cook for yourself, so you know what's going in that.

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Number three. So, example, dogs go through an adolescent period where their hormones are raging, and they are a little bit more trigger happy. But along with age comes experience.

So as a dog sees for example, a car drive in your driveway the first time they might go, “Woo! I don't know. I don't know what that is!” But after every day they see a car in the driveway experiences like, “Yeah, there's no need to get over excited about that because I see a car in the driveway every day.”

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So, experiences will change your dog's response. Alright, early training. This is another biggie. And this I believe is one of Tater Salad's problems.

So, Tater Salad spend a lot of time as a youngster at daycare where he got to play with all the dogs all the time and going to dog parks where the leash was released. And he got to play with all the dogs all the time. That creates a dog that is actually over socialized.



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And so, you're walking down the street with a dog and a dog like Tater, he's a bit of a meatball head, right? So, when we got him, his way of greeting dogs was to bull them over. And so, it was fun for him. I mean he wasn't a bully in that there's not a mean bone in that dog's body.

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But he was just an overexuberant greeter because he was over socialized. "I see dogs! I have to run up and play with them!" So, if you walk him down the street, every dog he sees he feels the need to "Oh! It's my long-lost friend. I know it is!" It's not so much anymore, but that's how he came to us. So early training can create a dog that has triggers that will send him over the top or make him overexcited or over aroused.

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Likewise, a lot of sport trainers feel that they need to make puppies crazy in order for them to be fast. And so, they'll take puppies from eight weeks old, and they just get them ripping and doing everything just fast, fast, fast. I don't happen to believe that.

I believe that we need to teach drive to our sport dogs, but I think we also I believe in the mantra that 'slow is smooth and smooth is fast'. And so, we need our dogs to be able to use their bodies correctly.

And when we're just focusing on fast is when our dogs, as they get older, 2, 3, 4-year-olds, they actually can potentially have some pretty life altering injuries because they were never taught to use their body correctly.

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So early, early training can play a big role in that. And also, second cousin to that, and this is point number five is the amount of frustration and punishment that is involved in that training.

Because as I mentioned, when dogs get frustrated, some dogs will just suppress, and they'll give up and they'll look so sad, and they might scratch their ear and we feel bad for them. It hurts us in our heart. And so, we're going to go about things a different way. But some dogs might get invigorated by failure.

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It doesn't mean they like it. Think of a people pleaser. You're a people pleaser and your boss, you want to make your boss really happy, and they come in and they go, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe this is happening. Why, why haven't you done that?" "Oohh, I'll get it done. I'll get it done right now." And then you get it done and they go, "Well, that's not the way I wanted it done. I want it done this way." "Oh my gosh. I've got to—!"

Think of dogs that have an invigorating response to frustration. They're not loving it. They're just a people pleaser.

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Their response to frustration is to get invigorated which looks like they're just having a great old time, but that's just their response. It's not an expression of joy. It's their response to frustration.

So, a big part of the problem with training is the expectations people have and then the capabilities that the dogs do or do not have.



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And I mean, if you've listened to this podcast, you've heard me say this many, many times that our dogs can only do the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment that we put them in.

So, a lot of times these dogs are over aroused because they're in an environment that they're not prepared for. They don't have the education to deal with that.

"Okay, Susan so then what can I do? What does success look like?" For me, it really comes down to three things. Number one is lowering the perceived excitement value in any situation for the dog. So, the excitement value is just the dog's perception.

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It's you know, they might go, "Oh my gosh look, Susan's here!" And then the next dog is going like, "Yes. No big deal. Susan's, Susan's here or whatever." We've got to lower your dog's perceived value of any situation where they normally would go cray cray. Now part and parcel with this is really important. We've got to raise our dog's responsiveness when they're excited and we do that at home.

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And the third part in this is we have to know our dogs round holes. Are we trying to take this dog and put him into this round hole? Because that's unfair. Are we trying to take a dog like a crazy, you know, highly driven sheep dog and try to make them a very calm and subdued family pet that never gets excited about anything?

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You know what, it is possible, but is that fair to the dog? At some point, I think we really need to accept the dog for who they are and love them for who they are.

So, what does that look like? It's two parts. It's lowering perceived excitement value and raising responsiveness under excitement. So, I've got 10 steps for you.

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Number one, please go back and watch [Shaped by Dog episode number 110](#) where I talked about *is our over aroused dog really just over-faced?*

Super important, a lot of important things in that episode. And you've got to examine your dog's behavior.

What is your dog behavior telling you? Where is he frustrated?

Remember we're going to be free of judgment. We're going to be free of blame. He isn't you know, out of control, crazy, stubborn. He's none of that. He's exhibiting behavior that's giving us feedback on something.

Either on the environment we've put them in or the education we've given them.

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So, examine that very critically. Critical model of the dog, but critical of environment or education. That brings me to **number two, which is really related. We need to make a list of what are your dog's triggers.** And your dog's big triggers I would say avoid them for six months until we get this protocol under control.



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And you can say, "Well, how can I do that? His trigger is walking out the front door." Well, if that's the case and we don't have a back door then we're going to have to deal with that. And I've got that in the protocol upcoming, but ideally make a list of the triggers, the ones you can avoid you're going to avoid until we do one of two things.

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We've got to lower his response to the perceived excitement or we're going to raise his responsiveness within that excitement. It's really simple. Simple but not so easy all the time.

Okay, **number three, a biggie. Your role.** Here's the thing. One of you has got to be calm in all situations and it's highly unlikely it sounds like that it's going to be your dog.

You have to be the calm one. So, you have to create anchors for yourself. Now, for me, I'm going to share with you a little secret when I go to the world championships and I'm excited but I'm not nervous. And I used to be nervous but, I don't know, 20 years ago I started playing this little game.

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Here's how it goes. Anytime I had a massage, when I was finished the massage I'd hold my breath, squeeze my hands as much as I could, and then let all the air out and release my hands. So that created an anchor for that relaxed state that I was in. And I would also do that after I meditated. I would take a deep breath in, hold it, squeeze my hands for maybe a count of three and then let it all go.

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And I could just feel a calmness come over me. Now, after a few years of doing this and it probably wasn't even a few years, I could stop clenching my hands. If you watch any videos of me at the world championships, one of the last things I do before I leave my dog is I take a deep breath and I let it all out. It just brings us calm over me.

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So, you need to create anchors for yourself that allow you to create instant calm. Now, are you going to go from a 10 to a 1? Probably not. But with practice you'll easily go from a 10 to a 5. And a 5 will allow you to be focused and know what you should be doing next.

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Within your role, you have to remove blame from the dog. You have to remove punishment. You have to remove verbal corrections.

Sport people listen to me; I'm going to do a special episode just for you. But in the meantime, please for the love of all that's holy stop giving your dogs timeouts. When they do things you think are wrong, stop carrying your dog off course. Just stop it, because that is blaming the dog for their emotional state and their emotional state comes down to you not preparing them properly.

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Number four, you're going to teach your dog these three key behaviors: Hot Zone, which you're going to find in [Perch Work \(Pivots and Spins\)](#). Also, we're going to give it in really long detail in [Home School the Dog](#) and in [Recallers](#). ItsYerChoice - and if you haven't got [ItsYerChoice](#) I'll leave you a link in the show notes how you can get it and the [Collar Grab](#) which I'll leave you a link to puppy games. But Collar Grab is also in Recallers.



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So, I'm going to leave a link here for where I teach it on YouTube, so it gives you the idea. These are key games. And that brings me to point **number five, we want to condition for your, dog an anchor that means 'let's be calm'**.

And so, collar grab is a biggie for me. I do so much grab the collar, give a cookie. So, after recall, grab the collar, give a cookie, give a long body stroke. And then I will give them a release word. Thank you for coming. Here's your reward for coming. Your reward for hanging around is [permission](#) to leave again.

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So, the cookie is coming, and the release can be invigorating, could be fun for them. Maybe your dog gets massages. Maybe it's just you, hanging out watching TV at night. Do long body strokes, pull the ears very gently. What is it that you can do that creates an anchor of calmness? You're not going to have a dog go from a 10 to a 1, but if your dog associates collar grab with cookies with just hanging out with you and then a quiet release, it will take them from a 10 to maybe an 8 or a 7. That's a great start.

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Number six, your dog's exercise. I want it to go through you. I don't want you to just mindlessly throw or chuck a ball. I want it to be contingent. So, build in a sit, build in a down, build in a stand, build in a calm collar grab, quiet pat, build in some scent work. If you don't have time to do some exercise outside, hide some cookies in some pillows and then have your dog search, come back to you, collar grab, cookie, come back beside you, some calming. So, it's exercise and then calm down, exercise and then calm down.

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Not just mindlessly fence running with the dog next door. Not just going to the dog park and "Yeah have at it!" No, it's got to be involved with you. **Number seven, this is a biggie. This is your dog's Netflix and chill.** So, part of the rehabilitation for my dog when we came out of COVID shut down the first time and she was terrified to see children and dogs and men, what I would do is I would go to different parks.

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I would sit on the bench. I would feed her cookies. I would maybe do some tug games with her. And I did it at a distance away that she never triggered to the children, to the dogs or the people. That is Netflix and chill. If you happen to live in the city and your dog is triggered to other dogs or to children or to other people or to bicycles, you can go and just chill on your front lawn provided it's far enough away from the trigger that your dog is not going to be over aroused.

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So, if it's not, you've got to go to a place that's further away. And what we want to do is create an experience that those things happen, but you don't lose your marbles. And so, Netflix and chill is a big part of your dog's rehabilitation so that they get experienced with 'that's just white noise'.

So, when This!, my puppy, used to go between my legs and alarm bark, like *alarm bark sound* when she saw any of that. Well, now it's white noise. She might look, but eventually we're going to get to a place where she won't even look. She certainly doesn't vocalize. She certainly doesn't put all her hair up in piloerection.



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It's just Netflix and chill. So, any other things that trigger your dog, you're going to go to the lowest level ones and set up some Netflix and chill time for your dog. **Number eight, you're going to create two to three behaviors that your dog knows really well.** You're going to do them at home and you're going to add excitement layers to it.

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So, what I want my dog to do is if I say "sit" or "down" or "stand", you will do it no matter what. And I'm going to show you a little video clip if you're watching this on YouTube. If you're listening in your car, come on over and watch one of my Recaller students with Aimee doing sit, down, stand.

The first one I'm going to show you the dog is on her back. So, this is different. Can your dog do a sit, down, stand with the dog being on your back? Now you might say, "Well, my dog weighs 200 pounds Susan so..." You know what, you might want to avoid this one, but you can do the next one.

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Put your dog in their Hot Zone and hide around the corner and do those behaviors. You might need a mirror to help you. Can you do jumping jacks and have your dog do those behaviors or pretend to run away. Sometimes it's something as simple as turning on really fun music and you know, let your hair down and have a dance. And if you've got neighbors that live close, pull the shades if you want, but otherwise just let that freak flag fly.

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Come on, let them know. And you're going to dance and ask those behaviors. Everything you do, that kind of excitement, we need our dogs to understand these are behaviors that you need to do immediately. So, sit, down, stand are easy ones. So, you might just pick two, sit and down. It doesn't matter how far away. It doesn't matter how much the excitement.

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Now, the more layers of excitement you can put on this, the more likely your dog will be learning responsiveness, will be learning what I call 'thoughtful and drive' in sport dogs. But for any dog, it's just being responsive in excitement. That's it. We need our dog to be responsive in excitement. It starts with clarity. Clarity of what that behavior means. Clarity about when that behavior is over.

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Go to see how I teach my stay behaviors, [episode number 134](#) and [episode 135](#). We need clarity that this word, 'search' means go look for food. That 'go play' means you can go and run off and play with your dog friends. That 'go see' means you can go and visit somebody else. That 'get it' means you can get this toy. Or 'freezer' means you can get this.

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So, the dog holds these control behaviors until they hear these words. Clarity creates confidence and confidence contributes to a calm dog. A dog that can remain responsive under excitement. And that is our ultimate goal. Now, when you're working this, remember we want to stay away from those triggers. We want to keep our dog under threshold.

But point number nine is if you find yourself in the middle of things and your dog does have a trigger to something, create distance away from that trigger.



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I personally love to use a head halter, but I condition it. You'll see that on [podcast episode number 40](#), how I condition the head halter, so my dogs really love them. So that I can use them at times like this, where I can get them out of dodge. So, if you're stuck in the middle you want to get [further away from the distraction](#).

And point number 10, allow the dog and accept the dog for who he is.

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Do not try to get that square peg into a round hole. Learn to be calm so that you can anchor him and use the 10 steps that I just went through to create a dog that doesn't have a trigger of high emotion. Because he's learned to respond to you, both your calming touch and your cues under high levels of distraction. I promise you this will make a difference for you and your dog. I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Tasty Treat Recipes for Your Dog:

[Get Your Free Tasty Treat Recipes Book](#)

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 110: Is Your Over-Aroused Dog Just Over-Faced In Training?](#)

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

[YouTube Video: Perch Work Pivots and Spins \(Hot Zone\)](#)

[Home School the Dog](#)

[Recallers](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 18: 4 Puppy and Dog Training Games for Acquired Bite Inhibition \(Collar Grab\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 11: The Power of Permission in Dog Training](#)

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

[Blog Post: How to Use the Distraction Intensity Index to Help Your Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 134: How To Teach A Dog Stay WITHOUT Luring, Collar Pops Or Using The Word "Stay"](#)

[Podcast Episode 135: Test Your Dog's Sit Stay Training](#)



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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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