

Episode: #167

Reduce Your Dog's Stress And Anxiety In Training

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG I was talking to a fellow trainer on the weekend, and we were discussing how much stress and anxiety is showing up in everything from pet owners to potential sport dogs. So today I thought I'd do a podcast all about how to avoid unnecessary stress for our dogs.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Let's face it, stress is everywhere. Stress has the same effect on dogs as it does on us humans. We get a hormonal release. We get a flood of cortisol. With dogs' cortisol we know doesn't leave their body for up to 72 hours. That cortisol and the hormonal release has effect of lowering immune system which can lead to illness, which can lead to problems with joints.

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We want to avoid unnecessary stress if we can. I know there is a lot of stress, and my goal isn't to never have my dog be stressed because I compete in a sport of agility and sometimes a dog's going to make a mistake. I don't want that to be the end of the world but nor do I want my dog to endure stress when they don't have to.

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So, first thing you should think about is how your dog deals with stress. Are they [a dog who stresses low or a dog who stresses high](#)?

For the majority of dogs when you think of stress - in podcast [episode number four](#) where I talked about your dog's body language the TEMP - that they show you that they're a little bit worried.

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You think of the typical dog with their ears pinned. Maybe you can see the whites of their eyes and they're panting a little bit. And their body is very, very tight.

Also, in [podcast 157](#) I went into even more details about your dog's body language and how to identify when the dog is not feeling a hundred percent at their best.

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And so typically we think of that poor dog that's just shut down when we think of a dog that stresses, but some dogs get [more and more frantic](#). And the appearance is that "oh, they're having a great time. Oh, look at them." And if they're making mistakes then the appearance is that "He doesn't care. He's just blowing me off. He's just being a big jerk."

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And the truth is that's just your dog's representation of stress. Both dogs need our help. Okay. So today we're gonna talk about how to set up your training so that we can minimize or negate stress and definitely negate any unnecessary stress in the dog. There's a few important things that you can do to eliminate unnecessary stress.



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By far the two biggies are the human mechanics and your training set up. Now within the human mechanics I'll include things like having a [training plan](#), having it ready, knowing what you're going to do, knowing when you're going to do it, how you deliver the rewards, how you [deliver those reinforcements](#) to your dogs.

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Are they delivered in a way that the dog doesn't have to wait and start star gazing and get anxious? Like "Okay, I did it right. You said I did it right. Where's my thing?" Right. So, your mechanics goes a long way. When I used to teach classes here every week my students would somewhat come in early and just practice without a dog.

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We're going to be working on behavior X. And so, I'm gonna do 'get it from this hand, into that hand into my dog's mouth'. I had a student who was a dentist over in Rochester. He used to come across a border every week and come to class and he was diligent about practicing without a dog. And it paid off dividends because things that we practice we get better at.

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And so, his mechanics became good. If your mechanics are slow and cumbersome and you drop the cookie or you don't have the cookie ready and it's not— then you got to break the cookie and or you thought, it's in this pocket. No, it's not in this pocket. It's in this pocket. All of that you're [creating stress in your dog that is unnecessary](#).

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"Oh, Susan it's just a little, little bit." Why would you want unnecessary stress in your dog? Why? Why? Not needed at all. Okay. So, your human mechanics. In order to improve that, number one way and you've heard me talk about this before. You've got to have a camera, your phone. Come on. Who doesn't have a smartphone?

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I know, I know there's a few of you out there that don't have a smartphone, but you can get a GoPro then if you don't have a smartphone. And just a little tripod or I'll give you a link to one of my favorite setups. If you want to get all posh, I'll give you [the link to what I use](#). I probably have 6 to 10 different tripods around here that I use.

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Some are in the building. Some are in the house, depending on what I'm doing. Sometimes I'm on the ground so I'll just want to tripod low. Sometimes I wanted to get a view from up above. And so, I have a number of different tripods. Heck I'll throw a few links in there for you. In order to improve your human mechanics, you have got to [video your training](#).

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And that is part of the setup for me. When I'm going to do a training session, I am very intentional about where I'm going to be videoing. So therefore, I am very intentional about the tripod that I'm using. And I've actually gone so far that I set up two cameras. So, I don't do that all the time, depending on what I'm training.



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But if I have set up a training session where I'm going to be sitting on the ground for part of my training and with the puppy, I'm doing a lot of that. And then I'm gonna be standing up for another part rather than have my puppy wait while I adjust things, I just go with two cameras.

Now I do have intentional breaks in the middle of my training where I can do those sorts of things but just in case I'll go with a lower tripod and a higher tripod.

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Okay. So, your mechanics as a trainer, how you deliver the reinforcement, that's a biggie. But another biggie, I mean I don't know if it could be bigger than how you deliver reinforcement, but this is a big cause of stress for a lot of dogs. It's how their owner transitions.

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From the crate into work. From playing with the dog to work to a balance break. And if you're not sure about balance breaks go to podcast [episode number 57](#), it's all in there. How do you transition? It's the gaps between the training. It's the gaps between each repetition of training. That is a transition.

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And if the transition is seamless and the dog doesn't notice anything then there's a very good chance your training is effective and efficient.

But if even between repetitions you've got to go "Oh, my clicker was backwards. I got to turn my clicker around." and "Oh, I didn't click at the right time." and "Oh my, oh, my bait bag just fell." then that is creating inefficiencies.

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And inefficiencies mean you are setting your dog up to experience more stress. Because what we want is to maximize our training time by minimizing the number of repetitions the dog needs to make before they get it right. And minimize the time between those repetitions.

That's what's going to make an efficient training session.

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Okay. So, the number two thing, your setup has a lot to do with how you transition. It has a lot to do with how many repetitions your dog has to do before they get it right.

And so, what does that look like? Ahead of time in your training plan you're gonna obviously you're going to plan 'what are the behaviors I'm gonna be teaching today?'

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So, I'll do one of two things. If I have a small training area, I will put my props, I'll set them up ahead of time either on a chair or a couch or somewhere that I could grab them in the midst of working for those seamless transitions. So, it might be I'm working [Crate Games](#) at the very beginning of my training.

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I've got the crate door open; I'm moving the dog back and forth. When the dog gets out, I will instantly start tugging. And as I'm tugging from the top of the crate, I might take a perch. [Perch Work \(Pivots and Spins\)](#). If you're not doing that with your puppy or your dog, go over to YouTube and check out that video.



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All right. And so, I'll always include Perch Work at least a few times a week for my puppy. As I'm tugging that perch is just thrown on the floor and I might then transition from my tugging. I'll just say out and she will instantly go for the perch with her front feet. And I'll throw the toy around my neck.

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I'll grab some cookies, probably they're in what I've always referred to as my kangaroo poach because I'm, that's what we used to call it when I was a kid. But a lot of people didn't know what that was. It's the pouch in the front of my hoodie. So, I'll grab the cookies for my hoodie, and I can seamlessly start to transition to train my dog.

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Okay. So, I will plan the stations that I want to train. So always will be with my puppy who's only 15 weeks old. It will be predominantly [Recallers](#) games and fitness exercises.

Right. I'm already just doing the foundation for her to learn fitness exercises. Occasionally it might be a jump grid but really, it's Recallers games and fitness. That's what we're working on.

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And so, I will plan, depending on the time and depending on the events three to five stations. So, if I'm working in a small space those stations are stacked either on top of the crate or on a chair where I can just grab them and throw them on the floor. If they take longer to set up, then what I'll do is I will have my puppy hop it up on a Hot Zone or have her pop back in her crate.

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If I don't have room in my small space for a Hot Zone and a crate then I can manipulate my environment, set up maybe two more stations, depending on how much room I have. And what that also does is it gives my dog a little bit of a break. So, I might train for three to five minutes.

In that three to five minute, I've done several balance breaks where I'm taking her away from the equipment and we're just doing some tugging. Maybe some sit tug sit. Maybe some sit, and I turn and run away, and she chases me.

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So, I'll do that then I'll hop her up in the Hot Zone while I set up the next station. When the next station's ready, she's learning guess what, you can chillax away from me and she's just learning that controlled behavior while I set up the next station and then I can release her.

If I want a bigger break like let's say I've just done a three-to-five-minute training session. I will have her hop it up in the Hot Zone or put her in her crate and just let her chill.

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I'll go to my record keeping book and I'll start taking notes. I may review a video just scrub back in my video right then and there depending on how much of a break I think she needs.

So that is what setting up a training session looks like. It's intentional. It's got stations.

Now, if I'm doing it in an area where it's a little bit bigger, I might set up all five stations kind of in an arc and I'll put the Hot Zone or the crate or both of them at the bottom at the end of the arc. Right.



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So that I can go from those points of starting to each of those stations and then back to those points which part of my plan is I know where I'm gonna set up my camera and so my camera is turned on before I ever get the puppy out to do that first training session. So intentional stations like I said for the puppy might be fitness and Recaller games.

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And then breaking that up with her having some longer durations back in her crate might be with the door open or on the Hot Zone where I get to take some notes and review my video and then go back. So, for me a training session can be three to five minutes. Or it can be several three to five minute sessions brought together.

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And so, I might be out there for 20 minutes or 30 minutes, but the puppy isn't working for 20 or 30 minutes. Right. So, the puppy might do five stations and they might take total if she worked them continuously for 12 to 15 minutes, but she's never ever worked them continuously. Right. That's what balance breaks are for.

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Okay. So, it's your mechanics, it's your setup, by being efficient we minimize the downtime that that puppy has. That means that we decreased the stress that puppy has to endure during their trading sessions.

Now, if you have a dog that gets over excited you might do your balance breaks with maybe some food. You might do some brain games rather than some high exciting tug games. Right.

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So, you have to know your dog and know what they need. Okay. New here on Shaped by Dog. I'm going to, from time to time at the end of the podcast, I'm going to answer a listener's question. So, the first question is from Laurie Clouthier who asks on podcast [episode number 53](#). "If you don't use food to get them to heal, what reward method do you use? You mentioned in a video you don't use food as a reward."

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So, Laurie I apologize if I confused you. I absolutely use food as one of my rewards for my dogs. You use what the dog finds reinforcing, and all of my dogs find food very, very reinforcing. So that is a big reinforcer for us. Along with toys tugging, those are the two biggest reinforcements.

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What I said was I do not use food lures when I train my dog. So, I do not present the food to them and guide them into a behavior like a heel at my side or lure them into a down or lure them back into a sit or lure them to come. I don't use food in that way. I only use food as a reinforcement.

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What I do and maybe that there's a whole podcast here. If you'd like to know more about how I shape behaviors when I don't food lure, just jump over to YouTube and leave me a comment. Because it's about using targets. So, for example if I wanted my dog at my side, I would be targeting this zone what I call [Reinforcement Zone](#).



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If I wanted a really specific behavior like for competition obedience, I would first shape a head position. And then that would go along with the shaping of the body in Reinforcement Zone. For some of my dogs I've actually used a physical target and we've used [various targets](#) from just a piece of duct tape on a wing back paper clip. Everything I do I [use targets](#).

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We can do a podcast that digs a little deeper into that if there's enough interest. Okay. That's it for today. Thank you for your questions. I've got lots more to come. And if you have a question you'd like to hear me answer at the end of the podcast then jump over to YouTube or leave it on shapedbydog.com.

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Wherever you can leave a comment on a podcast, we will find it. That's it. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

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

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

[Podcast Episode 157: Dog Body Language: Understanding Canine Communication Signals And Emotions](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 131: How Would Susan Garrett Plan Your Dog Training Sessions?](#)

[Podcast Episode 125: Why Isn't My Dog Learning What I'm Training?](#)

[Podcast Episode 31: 5 Simple Hacks to Help Your Dog Learn Faster \(Reinforcement Process\)](#)

[Susan's Favorite Tripods and Video Accessories](#)

[Podcast Episode 133: Become Your Own Dog Training Coach With This Video Strategy](#)

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

[Crate Games](#)

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

[Recallers](#)

[Podcast Episode 53: Stop Your Dog Pulling on Leash and Start Walking Together](#)

[YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone \(RZ\) with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Target Stick Training for Dogs Part One](#)

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Target Stick Training for Dogs Part Two](#)



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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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