

Dog Training A Stressed, Anxious Or Reactive Dog Part 2

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG If you were to google “help for my anxious stressed or reactive dog”, you're going to get a lot of great suggestions. Things like essential oils you should use, or nutritional supplements that you should include or not include, compression shirts that may be of benefit. And a lot of this is really, really good advice guys, and that is not what I'm going to be talking about in today's podcast.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped By Dog. And today is a continuation of podcast [episode number 168](#), where I talk about some of the elements of dog training that I think are critical for dogs who are stressed or anxious or need more confidence or potentially are reactive. And today is a continuation, but I've got a lot of things to get in this podcast.

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And I want you to keep two things in mind. First of all, please listen to the last podcast. I think it is just so important, especially the first bit where I talk about your mindset. I mean, I think all podcasts are important that we put out, but the beginning of that is just so important for all dog owners to listen to.

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The second thing is I'm going to cover a lot of suggestions in today's podcast, and I believe any one of these 10 Suggestions could be a podcast on their own.

So if there's something that you would go, “Susan, I really would like more information about this, or can you give me a deep dive or examples or do another whole podcast on this topic?”

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Please jump over to YouTube and leave a comment over on YouTube or send our team a note at wag@dogsthat.com okay.

So let's jump right in number one, your training should be [about reinforcement](#), not about isolating what you don't like. Okay. We want to grow our dog's confidence.

And as I've said, time and time again, our dogs are doing the best they can with the education that they have in the environment we've put them in.

You as a dog owner with a dog who needs more confidence or a dog who is stressed, or a dog who is anxious or a dog who's reactive. You are doing the best you can with the education you've been given in the environment you find yourself with your dog.

All right. So the only way it's going to get better is if you grow that education and while you're growing that education, you are not going to put yourself or your dog in a position where there's going to be judgment on either of you.

Okay. So big, big, big - I can't stress this enough. And some trainers might look at those dogs and say, oh, that dog's [being an alpha](#) - oh nay nay oh nay nay please, please.



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You want to grow that dog's confidence by using a structured reinforcement based program. Now I'm not saying there's a lot of people trying to use just reinforcement, which nobody's using just reinforcement.

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Everyone's using some negative punishment somewhere and inadvertently we are all humans. And every once in a while, we are going to lose our patience we might yell at our dog and there we go, positive punishment. Okay. But there are some dog training programs that are just like dumping cookie bags at dogs.

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And there is a lot of confused dogs because of it. There's a lot of great dog training. But there's a lot of bad dog training as well. And so I want you to be very intentional. Don't take the dog training class that's just local. Especially with so many options online.

Point number one, be really intentional about choosing a program that's growing your dog's confidence and not using blame, judgment or punishment to try and fix their behavior.

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Okay. Number two, I want you to know, and grow your dog's reinforcement. And as I talked about in the [last episode](#), believe the dog.

Believe the dog when they let you know what their number one reinforcement is. Okay. Let me expand on that. I'm going to share with you some of my previous dogs' number one reinforcement.

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My very first dog that I owned - of my own, Shelby, little Jack Russell terrier, her number one reinforcement was a rock. It could be any rock. She didn't chew on them. She just held them.

My previous sport mix who passed away just shy of 18 years. Her number one, reinforcement was a flyswatter.

Now, Momentum, who is now my 7 year old Border Collie, when she started out her agility career she was not really driven. She really didn't like to tug.

She was not your typical Border Collie. And so I actually did a workshop for my [Agility Nation](#) membership called building "Motivated Momentum".

Momentum now, today is the most driven. She's up there with the highest drive dogs I've ever worked in the sport of dog agility.

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She got there by me believing her when she said, this is my number one high value reward.

And for her, it was something she was previously afraid of that I built so much drive for it. It became her number one reward.

It was the chance to do a See-Saw, was terrified of the See-Saw growing up. And I just put a lot of good dog training into it.



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It became her number one thing that I could grow value for anything. So believe your dog. When they say this is what I like best. It might be food. It might be a toy. It might be an activity.

So for example, the See-Saw is an activity, the chance to do a See-Saw - but this is really important. I can't stress this is like colossally, monstrously, like massively important. When you have activities, the dogs love there has to be some contingency that attach the activities back to you. It starts with ItsYerChoice.

We [build in the permission](#) to do something, and that helps grow the anticipation of the chance to do something grows the dogs focus and drive for that something.

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And so whatever it is, that activity is that your dog loves to do, you need it to go through you. It's not like they're pulling to do - oh, I want to go. I want to go in the pond. I want to go in the pond and you just take off the leash - that is a [waste of permission](#). It didn't go through you. It was just the dog's pulling that gave them the opportunity to get what they want.

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Okay. Makes sense? So believe your dog when they say "this is what I love best", and then you want to grow it. So that the more reinforcements that we have as a dog trainer, the better and the easier dog training gets. So guess what? Guess how I got Momentum's drive to tug, by using the See-Saw.

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Okay. So know and grow. Believe the dog, know and grow the reinforcement. Believe the dog. Number three, you need to fall in love with [journaling your dog's triggers](#). So on the low end, there may be what's called perception triggers. And those are - you see a puppy and they see a leaf falling. They go, Ooh, who is that?

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Or they see a garbage bag on the street for the first time. Woo. That's interesting. Or they see like a big black dog. Oh, I've never, that's I've never seen a dog. So perception triggers are something that they notice. The lowest stimuli that they notice. And that's where you can do generalization and desensitization conditioning for the dog.

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All right. At the other end are fear triggers. All right. That, oh my gosh. I'm terrified of thunder. That's a fear trigger. Now, [when a dog has been triggered by fear](#), no learning can happen because they're in their back brain. They're in their lizard brain.

And unlike humans who we can say, Hey, it wasn't thunder, it was just a car back firing. We can't reason with dogs.

So therefore, those stress hormones stay in their body for much longer than it does with humans. Because if you think something was one thing and somebody goes that wasn't really, ah, I feel so dumb, then you can laugh it off. And the stress leaves your body much faster than a dog who we can't reason with them.

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So if they're afraid, they're convinced they're afraid. No learning can happen once they've been triggered to the [threshold of fear](#). So what you need to do is journal what triggers your dog into fear and what triggers the dog's interest curiosity right now, because what we want to do is we want to eliminate or lower that now.

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What can we do with fear? Here are my dog's top ten things that they're afraid of or six things, or ideally you might have only one or two that your dog is really triggered into fear. And then what you're going to do is you're going to grow distance away from that. All right.

So let me just say triggers don't stay static. They're either lowering like a puppy who sees leaf falling for the first time. Eventually that just becomes white noise, right? Leaves, fall. I don't care, whatever, a dog that's walked all the time in the city. They might see cars going by all the time. And at first they might go, whoa, that was interesting.

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Eventually, sometimes with good generalization and desensitization, it happens very, very quickly. And the dog goes, oh yeah, that car never really comes near me. I'm fine with that. But if you don't actively do it some dogs could grow either afraid of the car or the curiosity turns into interest to chase.

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So my point is triggers don't stay static. They either get lower or they grow an intensity and the dog starts triggering early and earlier. That means the threshold gets lower.

For example, a dog who's afraid of thunder. Guess what happens before thunder? Oh, it it gets dark. Okay. So anytime it gets dark, I might start being worried.

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What else happens before thunder? Oh, it rains. Ah, so now even just a little sprinkle outside could trigger those dogs, right?

The triggers either get worse for you and your dog or they get better. And that the dog learns to ignore them. You can become active and make sure they're always going in the right direction.

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If you just let it go, the way of nature, your dog could end up with a lot of fears. Okay. Journal and actively work to improve those.

Okay. Number four know and grow your dog's confidence zones. That is where is your dog super confident, willing to learn, very relaxed, very engaged, and very focused on you.

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So for example, I have a 15 week old puppy that I'm working with. I have what's, we call [a training den](#). We encourage all our students to set up a training den in their home.

I have a training den downstairs in the lower level. Super confident. Loves going there. All good things happen. The other place that we train puppies super early is in my bedroom because it's carpeted.

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We can close off from the other dogs. Really easy. So training den, my bedroom, no other dogs. I have a very confident focused dog who just wants to work. Now, the next level would be out in our living area where if you've seen videos of my puppy ripping around my - I have a very open concept home where she can go through the living room, into the dining area, and the kitchen is all one big circuit.

So I get slightly less attentiveness if I'm out there training and no other dogs, but we've worked up to her being able to train with one dog.

What if I took that puppy to a park? Which we live in the country. So the park would have all kinds of different stimuli.

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Would that be a confidence zone? No, it would not. So what you want to do is know and grow your dog's confidence zones. If I say "where's your dog, most confident" you can say, "training at home." Where? I've just given you three examples of different rooms in my home where I have different levels of confidence, depending on what's around those three different rooms.

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Okay. Know, and grow, make every room of your house a confidence zone. Then introduce one distraction to that confidence zone.

Because the conditioning that's gone on with you, if you're practicing the good games that I have [here on YouTube](#), your dog's being conditioned, "when I go into this confidence zone, all we do is have fun and I listen and I respond and everything's great."

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And so we want to grow that to other areas. So recently over the weekend, I started growing my confidence zone to outside with another dog. Cause I've got pretty good confidence outside with just me. Now I'm growing it to one dog outside. All right.

So, know and grow your dog's confidence zones.

Number five. In podcast, [episode number 111](#), I talked about anchor dogs and I really, really believe this makes a big difference for dogs who are stressed or they get over aroused or they get triggered when they're out in about, in an environment.

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So circulate with your friends find -"hey, does your dog get worried when there's motorcycles, would you mind coming with me?"

Who's a great anchor dog? Often, it's dogs who are beyond their adolescence, four, five to fifteen years old. That really are pretty chill about everything. Unless you're trying to create a dog who is more excited, and then you want a dog who might get more excited in different environments.

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Okay. So anchor dogs are great. Point number six. I'm going to give you a little science here, something called [Matching Law](#).

And that is, the reinforcement that your dog has been given for any behavior, in order to change that behavior, you have to get at least as high a reinforcement. I'm going to put a little asterisk on this.



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I don't want to go too deep, because this could be a podcast all on its own. But if your dog has been given a ton of reinforcement for pulling on a leash in that they're - they've gone to visit people or you've taken them off leash when they want to pull and visit somebody or when they want to go for a swim - and you decided I want my dog walking somewhere in my vicinity of my arm.

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Now, what you've got to do is you've got to either use unbelievably high value reinforcement to reinforce walking in the loose leash. Or you've got at least use the reinforcement, at least at the value that the dog got previously for a same length of time. So if you've been walking with your dog for five years and let's say they didn't pull for all of that time, but they've been pulling for six months worth of time.

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You're going to have to put in at least six months worth of at least equal reinforcement to overcome that. Or you do really good dog training and use higher value reinforcement. And that goes back to point number two that I talked about, and that is the values of your reinforcement. Okay. Matching Law. It's always there.

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Can't fight against it, but it requires, and it dictates that you be a little more patient when you're trying to overcome a previous reinforcement history the dog has with a behavior you would like to change now. Oh, this is a good one.

Number seven. You want to create active triggers for your dog. So just like there are perception triggers where the dog goes, "oh, I, I can't focus on you right now, because something's got my attention and I'm curious." And that curiosity, if you don't do anything about it, could morph into fear. All right or could morph into other things. So there are triggers that create fear or anxiety, but we can purposely create good triggers for our dogs. So I'm putting these into two categories.

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If we have a dog who tends to get too excited, we want to put in triggers that creates calm. They could be behaviors. They could be physical touches. And the other side, remember [in podcast 86](#), I spoke about the arousal curve and the arousal curve.

We want to get our dogs into that peak zone. I spoke up with that a little bit in [podcast 167](#) as well. Well, if we have a dog who is too low on the arousal curve, they're taking in too many insignificant stimuli. And then they're, they might go, "Oh, I don't like that. Oh, I don't like that." If we can get their arousal up, they're not going to notice those things because they're having so much fun with you. So you're going to build in triggers.

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Those are games and phrases that could change the dog's state. So the games will change their physiology, which helps moves them into the optimal arousal zone.

If we have a dog who is too over aroused, those games are going to change the physiology and lower their excitement level by increasing the amount the dog breathes by getting the dog more focused and calm.



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Okay. So you want to create active triggers. And that could go back to permission for activities that the dog has previously done. But regardless of the state, the dog is in, I am very intentional about this.

Not all dogs are the same, but you can categorize a - as, oh, this guy's got a really quick trigger and that he goes up pretty quick, or man, it's just like nothing excites this dog. And therefore they're taking in everything. Point number eight. Please [condition a love for all tools](#) that you're going to use in dog training. People say we're going to use a clicker. We need to condition it. I've actually seen dog trainer say, you need to click and cookie a dog for five days before you can use a clicker in your training.

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Okay. That's conditioning a tool that actually doesn't need to be conditioned because the act of using is conditioning it. You can just take it and start using it provided the dog's not afraid of the sound, of course. Okay. But there are other tools nobody ever talks about conditioning a dog's love for right.

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If you pick up a collar to put on the dog, you want the dog running towards you so that they can get the collar on you. Pick up a leash. You want the same response. Actively condition. The dog's love for those things. For example, with all of my puppies, I want them to spend some time on a [head halter](#).

So, I will spend a lot of time every day conditioning their love of a head halter, so it doesn't bother them when I choose to use it in my training. If a dog is a dog who stresses too high, it allows me to help turn their head towards a better choice for them. If it's a dog who stresses low that head halter help dogs be more confident because of the conditioning that's gone in with the head halter. It's super easy with a dog that is excited about something.

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I just have to wiggle their leash by that point. And they know that just like when I rode dressage, wiggling my bottom fingers, I could get my dog to take a round- or- my dog. I could get my horse to take a round or form. So, condition a love for any tool you want to use in your dog training.

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Number nine, if you have a dog who is sensitive, they're reactive, they need more confidence. Online training is a must for you because where else would you want to grow that dog's confidence and love rather than in the confidence zones of your home. So, you train that dog actively in an online environment.

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Of course, yes, we have [online training classes](#), but I'm not just doing this to pump my own tires and to tell you how amazing we are. I'm telling you, there's a lot of people who have online classes now after COVID. You want to train your dog using these online classes before you try to train them somewhere else.

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If you want to do agility, get all your foundation training at home, just like I'm doing with our puppy. A lot of training in the house, little bit outside. Very soon there's going to be a lot more outside than there ever is in the house. Inside has got the confidence zones. Alright, train your dog, using online classes.



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And then you can help grow their confidence and generalize that great confidence to all different environments, including other classes outside of the home.

And point number 10, there's a stigma associated this one. And you're going to say "Susan, I thought these were all dog training points?" They are, but this one I have to put in. Your dog training, a lot of times, will get easier if the dog who needs the behavioral medication is given behavioral medication. So if you are not having success with your dog training, because your dog triggers into a high state of arousal and you can't help them, better living through pharmaceuticals includes better training through pharmaceuticals.

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It's not a cop out. It's not that you've failed. Just like some people need pharmaceuticals to help them deal with reality. A lot of dogs do so much better when we change that reality for the dog. Some of these dogs, when we get them on meds early enough, you can start weaning them off after a few months or six months.

But even if your dog feels more comfortable for the rest of their on meds, that is what you should be doing. It is not a cop out. It is not a failure and your training will be far more successful. Okay. So there you have it 10 ways that you can help your dog grow their focus, their confidence, lower their anxiety and lower their stress.

All with dog training. Let me know if there's any one of those 10 that you would like me to do a deeper dive on an upcoming podcast. I'll see you next time, right here on Shaped By Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 168: Creating Confidence For Anxious, Stressed Or Reactive Dogs Part 1](#)

[Podcast Episode 94: How the Best Professional Dog Trainers Use Reinforcement](#)

[Podcast Episode 46: Is Your Dog Trying to Dominate You and What You Can Do About It](#)

[Agility Nation](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 90: Premack, Dog Training and Transfer of Value](#)

[Podcast Episode 71: Pro Dog Trainer's Secret to Help Your Naughty Dog](#)

[Podcast Episode 112: Stressed Dog? How Trigger Stacking Might Be Putting Your Dog Over Threshold](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Fearful Dogs Help with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 167: Reduce Your Dog's Stress And Anxiety In Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 166: Puppy Freedom: How Much Is Too Much?](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Training Games with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 111: How An Anchor Dog Can Help Overcome Your Dog's Anxiety Or Reactivity](#)

[Matching Law \(Wikipedia\)](#)

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

[YouTube Video: Puppy's First Training with Susan Garrett: Shaping, Targeting and Collar Conditioning](#)

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



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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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