

2 Types Of Connection With Dogs: Dog Agility And Daily Life Case Studies

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG Many times over the years I've asked a student, "Describe to me what your connection with your dog is like in different environments. How is it different inside your house versus in your front yard versus at a park, or near a body of water, or around other dogs, or children? Just describe what your connection with your dog is like." And, what I'll be told is, "Oh my gosh, my dog is amazing. I just love my dog, I love him so much."

And what they go on to describe is their connection to their dog, and not the connection with their dog. And there's a big, big difference. In today's podcast, I'm gonna share with you what that difference is, why it's super important that you understand it, and how growing one can also grow the other.

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Hi, welcome to Shaped by Dog, I'm Susan Garrett. And when you think of connection to a dog, that can really be evaluated by, when you're away on a business trip and the dog is out of sight, are they also out of mind?

Or are you like me, thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm missing my dogs. I haven't seen my dogs in like two days." That's a connection to your dog. And sometimes that's just innate. Like you see the puppy, or you see your rescue dog and you go, "Oh my gosh, you are the one."

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And for me, I've had three dogs that I knew instantly that they were the one. Either I saw a picture of them when they were newborns, or they were born in my hand and I knew they were the one. But sometimes that connection 'to' develops.

And it's kind of like people, right? Sometimes we instantly click with somebody, and other times that development is a little slower, but it's still every bit as deep. And a connection to a dog doesn't depend on how snuggly the dog is, sometimes you can't even explain it.

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You just know you have this deep connection to your dog. Now, your connection with a dog is reflected in when you're out in a forest where your dog may be off wandering, and you're the one out of sight. Is your dog likely going to check in on their own? Or if you whistle or give them a soft call, are they going to go, "Yeah, I'm right here."

That is a reflection of the connection with your dog, and the truth is, a weak connection with the dog can actually affect your connection to your dog.

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So what may have started off as a fairy book romance with your new puppy, by the time they get to be a 14-or-16-month-old dog, that could be now one that is weakening because of the connection 'with', and a lot of times the connection 'with' is a result of the training. The intentional training that gets done.

Now, sure, there's those rare relationships between a dog and an owner that just organically develop and they just have this unspoken language between each other, they understand each other.



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But for most of us, it's intentional. It's developed through training, and if you're one of my students, it's developed through the games that we play because if you have ever played any kind of a sport with somebody else, your relationship with that person deepens. The more joy and training you do together, the high fives get more frequent, the jokes, the laughter. And that's what happens when we train our dogs this way.

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Now, a weaker connection with a dog might be described with words like 'frustrated by,' or 'disappointed in,' or 'embarrassed by,' or 'overwhelmed by.' So those are words that may be used when you are in the midst of a connection crisis. So if you find yourself using those words, just know, it's okay. We've all been there and we can all find our way out provided you take the steps in the right direction.

It could be a long journey, or it could be an enjoyable one because for me, I think of one of the dogs I've been the most connected to in my lifetime of owning dogs is [my now two year old dog. This!](#)

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Of all the dogs I've ever owned, she, by far, has been the [most challenging and the progress together has been the slowest](#). So you would go, "Wow." So you would think connection 'with' means they're easy to train, we have success, we keep moving along. And so it's easy, it's easy to deepen that connection. But that doesn't have to be, if you've ever had a challenge that you've worked through and you've come through at the other side in a better place, you know that's a great way to deepen a connection.

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So any of you who feel frustrated or overwhelmed, or maybe, I hope not disappointed, or embarrassed by, it all happens.

Just know it can be turned around. And when you have that great, that deep connection with your dog, it's one where you have this understanding, [you have empathy](#).

You look to understand what's going on with your dog, rather than to judge them by a behavior that you may not like. You understand that dog's doing the best they can with the education you've given them in the environment that you've put them in.

And so you're looking to deepen your connection by growing your own understanding. And from your dog's point of view, the deeper connection you have together, the more freedom that dog gets.

The more confident they get in all environments and the more checking in they do with you, the lower the power of the environment has on that dog.

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So it doesn't matter if you are around other dogs that they normally would love to play with. It doesn't matter if you're walking them on a leash down the street, they are connected to you.

Now, that doesn't mean they have to be staring at you, right? That's not what connection's about. Think about a connection you have with somebody that you love. You can walk down the street, one form of connection is talking to each other. One form of connection is touching, maybe holding hands. But you can still walk with somebody, be connected, and walk in silence, right?



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And that happens with a dog when you have that deep connection. That is grown intentionally through games that respect the dog, where they're at as you help to go to a different place together. And for me, the sport of dog agility is like an amplifier of connection, because if you look at a novice dog and handler team, the lack of connection results in the dog leaving. Maybe they just go off and visit somebody, maybe they stop at the top of the A-frame and they just look around.

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Maybe they turn the wrong way, maybe you are going off focused and you think your dog is following and they absolutely aren't. Why? Because the connection is flawed.

It could be flawed from a weak foundation because a lot of times today, oh bless their heart, so many people are teaching dog agility and they think they're doing the right thing by [getting people on equipment and letting them experience agility](#). But what you're doing is you are actually going to weaken that dog's confidence because they don't have the connection, they don't have the understanding, they don't have the confidence to do the things we need them to do.

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And so we're actually doing a disservice to these dog and handlers, especially the people new to the sport as they set out to try to do something that they absolutely are not prepared for. And sometimes it's catastrophic and they just don't return. And that's just heartbreaking because dog agility is such an amazing sport. A sport that anyone can love. But you need a connection.

And when I think of a lack of connection in dog agility, I think of [one of our students, Jenny Kerwick](#). And when Jenny first came to us many years ago, she had a Siberian Husky.

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Yes, a Siberian Husky in dog agility named Oliver. Now Oliver was one of those dogs that was put into a class and put on equipment without a connection, and it showed up when they were put under the magnifying glass at an agility trial where sometimes, Oliver would just stop and spin in circles in front of the obstacles. He would create his own games. "Well, this is fun, isn't it?"

When Jenny found our program and learned about connection, now she was still able to deepen her connection with Oliver, but through the learning that she had, her most recent Siberian Husky not only went on to be a great agility dog, But actually won big classes like a Grand Prix, which allowed her to get to a regional, and guess what? She won the regional beating out other Border Collies.

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Border Collies that were kind of born to do agility. Okay, some people would say they're born to do sheep herding, I digress.

But Jenny's evolution from being frustrated and overwhelmed as a dog agility enthusiast, trying to love this sport with a breed that people traditionally would think, "Oh, that dog doesn't belong in this sport," to now a very successful and esteemed handler.

So that is the growth of connection. But it doesn't just happen in dog sports. I mean, I think dog sports again, are that amplifier.

Dog sports are the magnifying glass that point out the flaws in the connection, but the connection is needed at the very basic level, that of a family pet.



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And we've had so many students who have come to us frustrated, just pet dog owners who are overwhelmed by circumstance. For example, Cait, who came to us in our online classroom all the way from Cape Town, South Africa, and Cait got a puppy in Covid.

Many of you listening to this episode, probably in the same circumstance. Got a Covid puppy and she was overwhelmed. She had gone to some in-person classes, but did I mention that her dog Moshi was a Shiba Inu?

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Now, that is a breed of dog who most people would say, are very difficult to train. And Cait did her due diligence. She went to reinforcement-based dog training classes, and Moshi just could not deal with the level of distraction, the level of opportunity to be connected to other things in the environment. "I want to be connected to other dogs. I want to be connected to other people. I want to be connected to dirt." To little Moshi everything was something that he wanted to be connected to. "I can be connected to you, Cait, back at home. Here I want to be connected to other things." So many people in this exact same situation.

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But Cait's is a story of success through layers of connection. Well, I'll just [put a link to Cait's story here](#) in the podcast, in the show notes so that you can see for yourself how far that they've come.

Just by recognizing 'I need a different direction and I need to have empathy for my dog's situation, and realize what would be best for him, how can I help him grow so that our connection can grow?' So the more your connection 'with' a dog grows, you will find that connection 'to' the dog also grows. That's an amazing way it is. If those of you that are watching this on YouTube behind me you'll see a picture of my dog who I lost six months ago to cancer.

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Now, this is a picture taken at a World Championship event. We had just come across the finish line, and you can see the connection between us. Remember, dog sports, agility, magnifying glass on the connection you have with your dog.

Now, this picture in my mind celebrates that connection. We didn't know any outcomes. For me, there was not a crowd in the stands and for Feature, there was not people nearby that she could go visit.

It was about the two of us celebrating what had just gone on, that we were a team. She doing her job, going over the obstacles. I was doing my job as the navigator, getting her around this course.

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I had no idea that we ended up winning a gold medal because of that when this picture was taken. It was a celebration of connection. And that's what I want for every one of you listening to this. And so depending on when you're listening to this podcast, you'll have the opportunity to go and [watch my Connected Dog series](#).

And it is a series of six videos, including five lesson plans that I promise you, if you play those five games within 24 hours of playing the game, you're going to say, "Oh my gosh, that curly-haired lady is right. I do have a different connection with my dog, and my dog has a different connection with me." The next time you play that game, you'll see a change.





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When you play the next game, you'll see a change. An even deeper connection, one by one, layer by layer, intentional game by intentional game, you will see your connection with your dog blossom. So, I will leave a link to the Connected Dog series. If it's not available when you're listening to this podcast, then you will be able to sign up for the next time it's released.

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It's a series that I put together for our Recallers students, but it's a series that's so important I everybody to watch it. I want everybody to know if you're frustrated, if you're overwhelmed, it's just a sign of connection 'with'. It has nothing to do with how you feel about your connection 'to'.

And deepening the connection 'with' will eliminate all those negative feelings you may be having about your dog or even about yourself.

Give yourself grace. Take a deep breath, join the Connected Dog series, and learn where your next step should be for you and your dog. One game, I promise, you play one game and you will see what I mean.

I'll see you next time, right here on Shaped by Dog.

Connected Dog Video Series

[Click Here To View The Videos And Play The Games](#)

Resources:

[Hear From Jenny Kerwick About Her Amazing Agility Transformation](#)

[Watch The Story of Moshi the Shia Inu And Growing Connection With Cait](#)

[Podcast Episode 36: Puppy Selection: How I Do It and Why I Didn't This! Time](#)

[YouTube Video: Normalizing Imperfection in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 122: Being Present With Empathy In Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 114: Dog Agility Training: 3 Big Mistakes All Dog Owners Should Avoid](#)



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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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