

Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:00

SG Imagine if you had a way to trigger your dog to just relax. Can you see that as a benefit for you? Can you see applications for that? You might think, "Well, that would be great for dogs who are frantic or crazy or maybe dogs who are anxious, but I don't see a value for my dog."

Well, stick with me today because I'm going to share with you how I think you have one personally. So that's why I think your dog should have one, too.

00:00:35

Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And today it's all about the relaxation protocol. It's a protocol that involves conditioning, capturing, and shaping your dog's behavior to create the ability to get your dog to relax at key moments.

And it's not like we are hypnotizing your dog, but I said at the top, you have that ability. And let me share with you why I think that is, and how I use it on myself quite frequently.

00:01:04

The problem with trying to teach a dog relaxation, is that people teach it from the [wrong state](#).

They take a dog who's hyper and they try to teach it to relax in that hyper state, "settle, settle, settle."

Or they take a dog who's anxious and they try to get them to be calmer by, "That's okay, calm down. That's okay, you're doing fine."

00:01:29

Now I like to think that those of you listening to this podcasts are pretty logical and reasonable people. So, does it makes more sense to you to do what most people try to do, take a dog who is already stressing high or stressing low, already releasing stress hormones into their body and try then to teach the dog to learn to be calm?

Or does it make more sense to teach a dog a calm behavior, a relaxation protocol when they already pretty relaxed in the comfort of their own home, when they're not stressed at all?

Because that's exactly how you and I get triggered to relax at night in our own bed.

00:02:13

And the best approach is to teach relaxation and bombproof the relaxation.

So, no matter what you're faced with, the dog knows, "Oh, this is my trigger to just chill and relax. Okay, I can do this." So, you don't want to do it in the anxious or hyper state.

Now, once you've done what I'm going to teach you, you can bring that out in that anxious and hyper state and I promise you, you will see a different, a change in your dog state.

00:02:44

I'm not promising they're going to go from like a hundred to zero, but you will see a change and eventually they will go, "Ah, ah, oh, okay." And they'll just relax.



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

And to prove that to you, think of this: You wake up in the night, you have to go to the bathroom. You go to the bathroom, you come back to bed, you lay down, and what is the first thing you do?

00:03:05

If you're like most people, not all, but most people, you grab for your pillow.

What if somebody has moved your pillow? You're going to frantically try and find it.

And if you can't find it, you're going to turn your light on. Do you know why? "Yeah, because it's cozy, Susan." That pillow is a trigger. That pillow is the trigger that cues relaxation.

00:03:27

And for that reason, I tell my friends, because I travel so much and I have friends that travel from overseas and they say, "I always have jet lag when I come to North America." And I say, "It's because you don't travel with your pillow." I purposely at home sleep with a very, very thin pillow, and that pillow is what triggers me to fall asleep.

00:03:45

"Okay Susan, what's this got to do with my dog?" If you listen to or watched Shaped by Dog [episode number 107](#), you would've learned about the procedure I use to teach relaxation for my dogs to get any kind of husbandry. Their nails cut, their ears looked at, drops put in their mouth. It's about my dogs being relaxed during a procedure that most dogs would find really invasive and offensive.

And I want to cue my dogs to relax. So, we teach that relaxation ahead of time. For that, I have my dogs lying on their side. Now you can take that one step further. I also want my dogs to just chill and be relaxed in many other places in the world.

For example, I might be at an airport, and I'll bring out the trigger that says, "Here's where you relax." Or I could be at the veterinary clinic, "This is where we just relax." Or we could be at a place where there's kids or other dogs and you know, "This is where you just relax." So, there's a trigger for my dogs and that's what I want for you.

00:04:49

I want you to have a trigger that tells your dog, "This is just chill time." Ideally, they might even fall asleep. So first of all, you have to decide what is that trigger for your dog. It could be something as simple as a towel. I like to use something a little more substantial.

I love the [dirty dog doormats](#), and you can get them in different sizes. But I like them because there's rubber on the back. So, if I'm throwing them down at a veterinary clinic, they're not going to move around.

I often would take them to airports, I'll put them in my dog's crates, pull them out, and the dogs know, "Here's where I chill. There's busy activities, there's stuff I've never seen before. Here's where I chill."

That's the trigger of something they know. Boom. And as they get on with it, it doesn't even have to be the same thing. Likewise, if you go to a hotel, it might not be the exact same pillow, but a pillow will help you eventually fall asleep, right?

Far better than sleeping with nothing at all. Or even like a rolled-up towel would give you the same support, but it's not going to feel quite the same as a pillow. Pillow is the trigger that makes us fall to sleep.



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

00:05:50

Now I'm not saying your dog is going to fall asleep. They may, they may not. But we could use this for key times when your dog might be a little bit more anxious or your dog might get [over the top with arousal](#). Now, a lot of the dogs that get anxious or over aroused, you can help them just by your mannerisms.

So, you need to check in with yourself. Do like a body scan, if you have a dog who gets too aroused. Or if you're teaching this protocol and you tend to be a person that like, you know, if you've met those people that like they pulse energy, they have all this energy. [Okay, I might be talking about myself right now.]

00:06:29

So, I know when I'm shaping conditioning or capturing relaxation, I have to be very intentional about my own behavior. So, things like my voice. I'm going to lower it. I'm going to be very calm when I speak to my dog, and very confident. It's not going to be "Aaahhh!" It's just calm and confident.

00:06:49

I'm also with my motion. I'm not going to pat my dog with quick, fast smacks. That's what I would do if I want to get my dog excited to play. I'm going to stroke my dog long strokes, maybe between the eyes, a little long stroke, maybe long pulling of the ears if I want to cue a relaxed state. Also, my own breathing.

Here's a little trick, that might help you fall asleep with that pillow, that it triggers your own parasympathetic nervous system that will help you relax, especially after a time of stress.

00:07:21

I use it myself just before I meditate. Often if I can't fall asleep, I'll do this. It's a simple little trick. You breathe in for say five seconds. You hold it for slightly longer than you breathed in for, and then you blow out through your mouth for even longer.

So, it might be five seconds, seven seconds, eight or nine seconds of breathing, but breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. And that after you do that, three or four times, it will help to trigger a relaxed state.

00:07:52

Okay, before we jump in to how to teach that relaxation protocol, remember in [podcast episode number 189](#) I said there's 7 things that will influence your dog's behavior. So, you can't take a dog who is in pain and say, "We're going to coach you how to relax."

You can't take a dog who hasn't been exercised for months and they're really high drive dog and say, "I'm going to take you in this state, I'm going to teach you how to relax." Or a dog that's got poor nutrition.

00:08:18

So, go through those 7 things and make sure that you are helping your dog the best you can before you teach them the relaxation protocol.

Because you know what, you're helping yourself. The training will go a lot easier once you know that you've checked off those 7 boxes first.



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

00:08:36

Now of course there's nothing you can do about genetics. The genetics can get balanced with your good dog training that we're about to teach you.

00:08:43

Alright, so we've got you calm and relaxed.

Let's talk about the tools and the setup for conditioning, capturing, and [shaping](#) your dog to be more relaxed. First of all, once we get our dog in a relaxed state, and we have to do repetitions of this for the dog to be conditioned to be relaxed.

And so, think of a release word that you would use for your dog. And my dog has [many release words](#), but most of my dog's released words mean, "We're going to do something!" [Oh, my dogs are coming right now.]

So, words like "break" means we're about to do something exciting. Or if I use an agility word or the word "get it" means go get the toy, or release to "go see" means go chase after that person, go see that person.

00:09:31

And so, if you don't have a calm release word, I also have a calm release word. When I'm opening a door and I'm letting my dog out and I don't know if there's traffic around, I use the cue "with me" which is just calm, and I say it in a nice, calm voice. I just want the dog to walk with me. No need to get excited, we're not doing anything high or exciting.

So, we need to condition that "with me" cue. I'll tell you how you're going to do it in a second. So, you've got your trigger, your towel, or your mat.

00:10:00

You could use a dog bed, but I would encourage you to put the towel or the mat in the dog bed. I like using the dog bed especially if you've got dogs that love their dog beds, perfect.

We're going to borrow the value of that dog bed by putting your new relaxation trigger inside of that. I don't encourage you to just use a dog bed because depending on the size of your dog or where you're going, that's a big thing to carry around.

00:10:25

So, for example on [podcast episode number 180](#), I talked about taking my puppy out to outdoor cafes and I brought my relaxation trigger, the blanket, for the puppy to just lay on outside. So, we want to have something portable that we can take into tight places.

So, you don't want something big and bulky for that reason. You can put it inside of something big and bulky when you're training it, but eventually you want to take it outside of it too.

00:10:52

The other prerequisite I recommend is the game [ItsYerChoice](#), and I'll leave a link in the show notes so if you have never played ItsYerChoice I'll give you an invitation on me, to allow me to teach you how to play it.

Why do I like ItsYerChoice for teaching relaxation? Well, I like ItsYerChoice for teaching anything, but one of the big parts of the relaxation is that the dog gets the reinforcement while they're relaxing.



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

00:11:19

Now, unlike most behaviors that I teach, I actually use a lot of capturing as well as conditioning and shaping for that relaxation protocol. And so, think about if you were shaping any behavior and if you marked it and then the dog sprung up and ran to you to get their cookie, how relaxed are they going to be at that point?

00:11:39

So, with ItsYerChoice, they understand reinforcement is coming directly to their mouth. They don't even have to lift their head, just stay in a relaxed position. And finally, in the very late stages, we're going to add a cue but we'll get to that later. First thing up is conditioning. Now, this is a pretty quick state because we don't want your dog to associate that mat with a ton of really high value reinforcement.

We want it to be important. So, during the conditioning stage what I do is I might bring it out, and then put their dinner down. Now, if they go crazy and they're anxious for dinner, don't bring it out around dinner.

00:12:17

When you know, there's different areas around the house where your dog likes to lie down, especially if they're a dog that likes to get on the couch with you, put that out there, call them up, give them a cookie, and then release them off, pick it up and take it away. So, during the conditioning stage you can say any release word you want, it's just for them to go, "Oh, there's that thing again. That thing was really kind of cool."

You could even do what I suggested in [podcast episode number 107](#) and put it in a bag, bring it out, feed them, and put it away. So, it's not a big deal. I just want them to go, "Oh. There's that thing. I'm interested in that. What are we doing with that?"

00:12:51

That conditioning stage doesn't have to last a long time. Imagine if every time I put my head on the pillow, somebody came in with gourmet vegan chocolate chip cookies. Ooh, all of a sudden relaxation wouldn't really be the trigger anymore, right?

You're only going to do a few sessions, maybe 10 or 15 reinforcements of 'see this thing, get a reinforcement,' that's it. Now the thing has a little bit of value. We can move on to the second stage, which is capturing.

00:13:22

So, capturing and you might have many of these targets and have them in places you know your dog likes to lie around the house. And the other thing you need to do, if you don't already do this, this is a great idea, have little bowls of food around your house randomly.

Especially if you have it near where you know your dog's going to lie and so that you can, when you see your dog lying there, you're not going to go, "Hey, so good!" You're not gonna click them because we're not going to get them and go, "Whooo!"

00:13:48

You're just going to, if anything, walk by don't even look at them. Lower, kind of get into a crouch, drop the cookie near the dog and keep walking. Not a big deal. "Oh yeah. You're in the chill zone. I like that. I like it when you're in the chill zone."



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

00:14:02

We're helping to further condition that that target is a great place just to relax. That can happen for weeks and weeks.

Capture the dog lying in the chill zone, walk by, it can be any value of cookie because the dogs just going to eat it and go back to relaxing.

Now while you're doing that, we are going to now purposely shape that.

00:14:30

So, in one of your training sessions, bring out your dog bed, put the chill zone inside the dog bed, and you're just going to maybe release the dog, have them in a crate, let them watch what you're doing and they're going to immediately go over in and jump in there, right?

When they do, you can add a few reinforcements and then give them their new release word, if you haven't started using it yet, you're going to just say "with me," walk them, encourage them to come off, and when they come off the bed, stroke them. Nice, calm stroke.

Give them a lower value reward than you were giving them on the bed. And you might not even need to give them any reward for coming off and don't do it every time.

00:15:08

However, some dogs might say, "Well, why would I leave the chill zone because I only get really good cookies?" So you might have to reverse the value and give higher value for leaving. But when you say "with me" they got to leave the chill zone. So your goal is to get your dog to lie down in whatever position you know is comfortable for your dog.

00:15:28

So, if you have a dog that loves to lay flat out, then you can condition that. If you have a dog that you know they love to lay with their chin on a paw, or they like to curl up into a little ball, that's what we're going to encourage them, shape them, to take that position.

And again, this isn't shaping with the clicker.

You have a bowl of cookies, you've played ItsYerChoice, so the dog isn't going to try and mug you for those cookies. You might just pick one up, if the dog tries to get out of the bed, put it back down, pick it up, put it back down.

And we're just doing what Jean Donaldson calls *rule outs*. Pick one up. No, I'm putting it back down. Picking it up, putting it back down, picking it up and then I'm going to bring it into you.

00:16:10

Do a few reinforcements. What we want to do is to get you out of the picture. So that you can stand up and the dog still can chill. You can maybe leave a few inches away and come back and your dog can chill. After you've done a few of these shaping sessions, you can add a cue.

00:16:32

Now, honestly the target itself is the cue. I do not have a cue for my dogs. They see that bed come out, they will hop it up and just chill. I mean, I think the cue "chill" would be a good one.

But you can't say it as they're anxious and they're on their bed, but they're not settling, you can't just keep saying, "chill, chill, chill" because that's actually cranking them up.



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

00:16:53

Remember your part, your breathing, your voice, your movements, your patting, that all contributes to the dog's relaxed state. If you're going to add a cue, you're going to have your dog in a bed or a crate. Put your target out there and you could just say to your dog "chill" and that is meaningless to them.

Then tell them "With me", they'll come over, get on the bed because there's so much value, because it's been conditioned and because it's been captured, they're going to want to get on that bed. So, the shaping process, be very careful that you're aware of your dog's relaxed date.

How are you going to tell that? Well go back to their [T.E.M.P.](#) But also there's an app that I use. Now, I don't specifically use it to measure relaxation, but you can. It's called *Cardalis* and there's a number of other apps. I actually use this because my oldest dog has got a heart problem and *Cardalis* allows you to measure your dog's respiration rate. So that's a great sign of how relaxed your dog is.

00:17:52

And on your phone, you just touch it every time you see your dog breathing, and it'll give you a record of your dog's breathing, which aka is a great base of how relaxed your dog is. So that's one way you can do it.

So, we've got a dog that will chill when they see the target. We've got the dog that knows that they need to stay there until you give them the 'with me' cue. Now you're going to start to try to build some duration on that. What probably one of the easiest ways you can do that is by using a remote feeder. So, you can introduce a remote feeder right near the chill zone, and you can you know, move a few feet away.

00:18:30

Now obviously if you've never tried a remote feeder, you need to introduce that first. I'm going to add a link to a couple of the ones that I use. I love my Pet Tutor, but it's very high tech. I think it's the most expensive remote feeder that I have. [Treat and Train](#) is also very, very good.

But the one that I've been using most right now is called the [PETGEEK](#), and I like to use it because it's super cheap. And so, it's one that I can recommend to people, and I know it's not going to break the bank for them.

Alright, so I'll put links to all of those in there for you. So, you've now got a remote feeder in there. You can leave the room, you can reinforce. Now the dog can just sleep in front of the temple that is the remote feeder. Once in a while you can wake them up if you want, or not.

We now are helping to build some reinforcement into the chill, but the actual act of relaxing is conditioning the target of the mat. And so, the reinforcement is extra, but if you give too much reinforcement, you're going to get a dog all hyper.

00:19:31

Now, if your dog already loves your remote feeder, when you bring that in, you might get the opposite of chill. That's okay. Just leave it there. Don't reinforce from it for a long time, until the dog ignores it. Then you can reinforce for from it once then you might have to just ignore it for a little while longer.

Eventually your dogs can go, "Oh yeah, every once in a while, that thing gives me something. Yeah, I'm going to sleep right really close to the candy machine. It's a good thing. Yeah, I like the candy machine."



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

00:19:56

Now you've got that protocol. Now this protocol is something that you can work in as a [Daily Quickie](#). You know, do it several times a day. You might say, "What am I going to do now? Susan, I've got a dog who I've got anxiety with people, or I've got separation anxiety."

00:20:13

If you would like to know how to further the relaxation protocol, just jump over to YouTube. Leave me a comment and say, "Yes, I would love to have a dog more calm when I leave the house." Or whatever it is that you are looking for. And I'll come back and circle around to this topic in a future episode right here on Shaped by Dog. I'll see you next time.

ItsYerChoice Summit

Learn how to play ItsYerChoice:

<https://recallers.com/iycsummit-join/>

Resources

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

[Podcast Episode 107: Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!](#)

[Dirty Dog Doormats](#)

[Podcast Episode 136: Help Your Excited Dog Calm Down And Stop Barking, Lunging, Spinning, Nipping](#)

[Podcast Episode 189: All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You](#)

[Podcast Episode 171: Dog Training With Layered Shaping: Why Classical Conditioning Must Come First](#)

[Podcast Episode 151: How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!](#)

[Podcast Episode 180: Taking Your Puppy To A Café Or Restaurant: Socialization Success](#)

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

[Cardalis App - iOS](#)

[Cardalis App - Android](#)

[PetSafe Treat and Train Remote Reward Dog Trainer](#)

[PETGEEK IQ Training Treat Dispenser](#)

[Podcast Episode 190: Using Daily Quickies To Fast Track Your Dog Training And Grow Your Dog's Skills](#)



Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation

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.



Meet Us Online

- Website <https://dogsthat.com>
- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SusanGarrettDogAgility/>
- Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/SusanGarrettDogsThat/>
- TikTok <https://www.tiktok.com/@dogsthat>
- LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogsthat>
- Pinterest <https://pinterest.ca/dogsthatcom/>
- Twitter <https://twitter.com/susangarrett>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/c/DogsThat>
- YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/ClickerDogs>

