

Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

Speaker Key

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Transcript

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SG In case nobody told you, pretty much all puppies will go through what's called a fear period. A period of time during their growth that they're afraid of things. And it may be that they're afraid of people or children or other dogs. And unfortunately, some of the strategies that these people are told to do, are the absolute worst thing possible.

In today's episode, I'm going to go over the three things you really should never do when your puppy or rescue dog is showing signs of fear of people. And the "3E" Strategy that I have for you that's going to build confidence in your puppy and help you see there is hope for a better tomorrow.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And yes, I am going to refer you back to many other podcasts. I'll list them all at the end, so don't be overwhelmed. And if you're watching this on YouTube, you'll be able to just click the YouTube links and go directly to those episodes.

Ok, what are the three things that people might do with puppies who show fear of people that are the absolute worst thing that they could possibly do? Now, I think two are pretty obvious. And one may not be.

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Now, the worst thing that you can do if you have a puppy or a rescue dog that's afraid of people, is to tie that dog up somewhere where people can get at them. Like, "I'm just going to run into the store, so I'm just going to tie you here for a bit." Now, that puppy may not be afraid of people yet, but if you leave them tied alone on a busy street, they may start to become so. So never ever. You know what, we are our dog's best advocates. Never tie your dog somewhere unattended. It's just disrespectful to the puppy or dog.

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The second thing that people may do is just hand their puppy over to somebody. Like, "My puppy's a little afraid of people, can you just take him? Get him used to people." "He's not really used to men. Can you just take him?"

And that's called flooding where we, you know, if you're afraid of spiders, we'll put you in a room filled with three billion spiders. You'll realize they're not going to hurt you and eventually you won't be afraid of spiders.

But what often happens with flooding is the reverse, is you intensify that fear. So please, if your puppy is showing any sort of anxiety or weariness towards people or children, or specific people or children, please don't hand that puppy over.

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Now, the second cousin to that and the third thing that people do, and this one people are often told to do, is they give people cookies and say, "Can you feed my puppy?" And you've got the puppy on your leash, and you try to coax that puppy closer and the puppy's kind of going in and going out and trying to grab the cookie because they want the cookie, but they're really afraid of the kid or the person.



Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

00:02:53

No. Please, no. Because what you're doing as that puppy's going in to grab the cookie, they are going over threshold. They are in a state of fear. And so, they're just grabbing that food because they love food, but you're not actually helping them be confident when they're around people. It's actually the reverse.

You're conditioning them to be fearful but go in and grab that cookie and get out. So those three things, especially the last two are pretty commonplace with new puppies. And please, if that's something that's been advised to you, just listen to what I have to say and think of this as a better strategy.

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So, what I have for you today is the 3E's of puppy socializing. So picture a Venn diagram. Three circles, and they intersect, and there's this little slice in the middle. So, the first circle is the *education circle*. The second circle is the *environment*. And the third circle is the *empowering*.

So, the first circle, educate. What we really need to do is to grow that puppy's confidence, that is important. And the more that puppy can learn, the more they're going to be confident because, "Oh, I get that. Yeah, I could do that." But there's a few key things that I really encourage you to teach your puppy, and the first one is actually something that leads to them becoming more empowered.

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And it's the game [ItsYerChoice](#). Because we are giving control to the puppy. And it is a little bit of a weird thing because most people talk about the need to control their dogs, or they need to control their dogs in this environment. And I'm saying we need to give the puppy the control.

ItsYerChoice does just that because the puppy sees what they want and their behavior controls access to getting what they want. And that is the basis of everything we do. From that you can go to [Crate Games](#). Again, it's a game of choice that the puppy grows confidence through making good choices. And guess what, they get more confident being in that crate as well.

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The next game I spoke about in [podcast episode number 191](#), and that is Functional Relaxation. That the puppy learns, now depending on the age of the puppy, you may not have great success at first. They might not be old enough to be able to stretch out, but if you do it when they're tired, you probably will have some pretty darn good success. So that we are conditioning a blanket, a location to be 'this is where we are relaxed.'

Now, two cues that I want your puppy to learn. The cue "search" which means you now have permission to take a cookie I threw on the floor. And the cue "cookie" or whatever you want to call it. You don't have to use my words.

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'Cookie' means I'm going to deliver a cookie to where you are. You do not need to move. So, if you're going to use the word cookie as you go, if you're playing crate games and you say "cookie" and you go to give your puppy a cookie in the crate, and they kind of step forward, I would just hold my hand around the cookie for one second because they know ItsYerChoice.

"Oh, right. I'm not supposed to move." Then you can go in and feed them the cookie. They understand 'cookie' means it's coming to you. 'Search' means it's happening on the floor.



Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

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Right, so now we've got some games of choice that the puppy understands. Plus, we've got some cues that the puppy understands mean 'your reinforcement is coming, it's headed your way.' Two more things I'd like you to teach your puppy. Number one is [Hot Zone](#), which is a second cousin to Crate Games.

Once you've got Crate Games and you've got the relaxation protocol, Hot Zone is just so darn easy. So, the puppy knows this dog bed is when we tell them to hop it up, that that's where we'd like them to stay. And we can say "cookie" and feed cookies there. And when we want them to come out, we can say "search" and toss a cookie out on the ground once they come out.

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Now the next thing I'd like you to do is teach the behavior *prrrp*! "What was that, Susan?" "What? You didn't hear me?" I want you to teach the behavior *prrrp*! And I want you to use a cue that sounds similar to that. Now if you can't make that noise, make a unique, funny noise that your dog understands means 'come between my legs.'

And I really don't want you to say a word like "between" because that word *prrrp* is it really a word? How would you spell that Susan? I'm not good at spelling. That cue, it's distinct, it's unique, and we're going to use it when our dogs might not be quite as confident as they should be.

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So, if our dog is just you know, not over threshold, but not as confident and as comfortable as they should be then if you say things like sit or down, they're just going to be like Charlie Brown's teacher, right? 'Wah, wah, wah.' Because your dog's focus is going to be, "Oh, I see somebody. I'm not sure if I really want them."

But if you say to them *prrrp*, "Oh, that's different. Oh yeah." That will kind of recharge their back to something that's a fun game, come between your legs. And guess what, when they're between your legs, it's a place of comfort. Because you are kind of protecting them with your legs. So, it's win, win, win. Super important behavior. I really encourage you.

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If you've never taught that, just go to my video on [teaching targets](#). Use a target stick and you can get your dog to go between your legs and get them to line up there. Use your word cookie, search, get them out. Before long, you'll have them sitting between your legs.

The next thing I want you to do is teach that [puppy to tug](#). Ideally, that started as soon as you got the puppy home. I mean, I love teaching tug to a puppy. Teach them to tug with one toy, teach them to tug with another toy, teach them to tug with that toy while you bring this one in, and then you say "spit" or "switch" or "new toy" and then they change to that toy. All about learning ItsYerChoice in different forms.

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So now we've got a puppy that will tug. The final thing I encourage you to do is teach fun tricks. Why? Because the more education we can give that puppy, the more we're growing their confidence. "I can do that. Yeah, I can do that, and I can do that!" So, the tricks can be functional, like *prrrp* really is a trick. It could be just something fun that you like to do and that your puppy likes to do, like crawling. We have a video on YouTube on [how to teach your puppy to crawl](#).



Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

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So, anything you can teach your dog as long as you're teaching it [with shaping](#). You know, I don't use lures myself very often with my own dogs. And I'm not saying you can't have success. But in this instance, we want to empower the puppy and that involves them being in control of the training and chasing food, as in a lure, isn't going to give them that.

Because they are not in control of the training, they're chasing the food. So, if you're somebody who's used a lot of lures, just for this one time, please shape the puppy. We're educating. So now we have a whole long list of education. Now what we've got to do is we've got to grow the environments of confidence.

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So just know that you actually are part of the environment. So, part of changing the environment is changing you. You become the new. So, your puppy is confident and happy with you, and this will work best if there's somebody that can help you. But if not, you can do it all your own. Have the puppy in a crate, open the door, and then before you release them put on a wig.

You're the new you. And that gets them used to, "Oh, I might be a little worried. This is somebody I don't know." "Oh, I can't believe I didn't know it was you!" And it could be, maybe you dress up in a long gown. Maybe you have a Halloween costume, maybe wear a hat. Maybe you're walking in a walker. All of these things change you to the new you, which gives that puppy an opportunity to be conditioned to "Not all people are bad. Actually, no people are bad. I can meet anybody. It's okay."

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So, you become the new you. That's part of the environment changing. And growing confidence in lots of environments. You will help grow that dog's confidence just by being you. Your puppy knows you. They love you. And if you have more people in the family, maybe there's one or two or all of the family members with the puppy can be confident with.

That is important. So, if some stranger came and took your puppy away from home, not only would they be afraid of the stranger, they would no longer have the anchor of your confidence. So, confidence in you is important. Therefore, it's important that you be confident. Yeah, none of us like that our dogs or our puppies are not confident right off the bat, or they're going through this little period, you need to know, 'Susan said this is going to get better.'

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So, if you end up in a situation that you didn't plan on, and your puppy sees children and they're afraid of children and they go over threshold, instead of saying, "Oh no, oh no, oh no. Let's, oh come, come on, come on, let's get out of there!"

You're going to say to that puppy, "Hey, we didn't plan this, did we? Come on, let's get out of dodge!" and you're going to leave. But you're going to leave as a confident person leading a puppy that needs confidence. So, when you're training the puppy in any environment, you are the confidence person.

And another great anchor of confidence I spoke about in [podcast episode number 111](#), an anchor dog. So, if you have another dog, we're going to different environments to train, if you have access to another dog that's really confident in all environments and with all people, an anchor dog is great. And if you have a friend that's got one of those dogs that's just kind of bombproof, later when we do some training, you're going to say, "Hey, can you bring your dog over while I'm helping my puppy be more confident?"



Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

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Now of course that's not going to work if your puppy's afraid of dogs. But it will work if it's people that we're working on. And that really is the focus of today's podcast. So, environments. You are going to set up a minimum of two what I call 'training dens' in your home. Now, I advocate here that we start training with our puppies in the bathroom, crapper training. But that's just until we get focused for work and focus for what we want. And then you can grow that to a different room of your house. The next biggest room, it might be a bedroom.

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And then we want to do training, a training den in your living room, a place where people might come to visit. Therefore, that training den ideally shouldn't be right at the front door. Further away from where the people might be. So set up a training den where you're going to be doing all of those tricks and games that we're playing to educate the puppy will be done in the training den in your bedroom, in the training den in your living room.

The target that you use for your relaxation protocol. You could have one in each of those environments that would be ideal. If that's not possible, you know what, they travel back and forth. So, we need to grow confidence in environments where the puppy is confident.

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So, a lot of the training, you're going to be intentionally training, once you get great behaviors in the bathroom. Now we're not going to go back in the bathroom, we're going to be in the bedroom or in the living room. If you've got a big house, you can grow that to all other areas, other spots of your house, places where the puppy goes all the time, those will be the next most confident areas.

Places where the puppy doesn't go very often. Maybe you have a lower level to your house. Maybe you have a place where the puppy has never been. So that's just once you get confidence, we're going to grow that confidence in different areas of your house. If you have a backyard, it could be the backyard. That's another environment.

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Remember, we want to see a confident puppy, so you need to know what that looks like. Go back to my [podcast episode on TEMP](#), where you can see that this puppy is happy, is showing great confidence. How do you know that they're confident in their behaviors? They're fast and they're joyful. That tells you, "Oh, she loves what she's doing." "Oh, he just loves when I go *prp*" and he goes right between my legs. It's so much fun. He loves it!" So, you're going to, all the behaviors that you're growing, you can grow them.

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The more environments that you ask the dog to do those behaviors, the more you generalize both the ability to do those behaviors and the environments that you're doing them in. Okay, now we've got our third circle, and that is the empowering circle.

Now this starts with ItsYerChoice, but what we want to do is we want to hand over the control of the training to the puppy by acknowledging 'your choices will get me to reinforce you. And if you are confused and you're stalling out, it means I've gone too far too fast. I will empower you by backing off, going back to where you were confident and joyful and not be in a hurry. I'll be patient to grow these behaviors only when your behavior shows me that you are very joyful and very confident in what we're doing.'



Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

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So, there will be times where their confidence might dip a little bit, but as long as they're working through, you don't immediately go, "Oh my gosh, we've got to stop this." It's when the dog's like stalling out and going, "I'm not sure what I should be doing here." Then you know that there's been a flaw in your protocol, in your training plan.

Your anchor dog also will show, will model for your dog what empowerment looks like by being confident in any environment that you have that puppy in.

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Now finally, you need to empower that puppy by trusting [the communication they're giving](#) you. Remember, the only way they can tell us that they're not comfortable is with their voice and that's usually the last thing they use. Or with their body. Ears flicking, looking at the way they're carrying their posture.

Every part of their body will tell you if they are happy and confident in that environment, or if you need to go to a different environment. Now, an environment could be obviously your home, but if you're going where one of the things that might trigger your puppy, kids are, you're not going to go like within 50 feet of them.

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So, it's an environment that's different from your home, but it's a long way [away from a trigger](#). And so that you can play your games, you can play all those things in that environment out of your home. But that is an empowering environment because it's far away.

And you trust your puppy if somebody surprises them when the puppy says, "Hm, I'm not sure about this." And you say, "Hey, can you tug with me?" And you get them out of that environment until you know they can handle it.

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Okay, now we have our education circle. We have our environment and we have our empowering circle. Where education and environment overlap, there's going to be a little thin line where they overlap. That little thin area will tell you all the environments that your puppy can do all of their games.

I can do all of my games in just one environment, just the bedroom. Or, I can do all of my games in these environments and you're going to record keep these guys because we want to grow a confident, happy, joyful puppy. So, it's going to tell you the environments or the one or two environments they can do all of their games.

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What environment can they do all of their training brilliantly and joyfully? And then where the environment overlaps the empowerment, that's where the puppy will show you 'these are the environments I feel most confident.' So, the first one was telling you the environment where the puppy could play all their games.

The second one was telling you the few environments that puppy feels empowered. They're most confident. Yes, these are the environments that, "Yeah, I got this. Check off, no problem." The third overlap is where empowerment, the empowerment circle overlaps the education circle. And those are the behaviors that your dog will tell you that you can use to test their confidence in new environments.



Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

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For example, for my puppy, This!, *prrrp* is one. If she won't do that behavior, I know she's not happy. Another one is when I ask her, "Are you scary good?" The word 'scary' is her word to speak. If she won't bark, then she could be worried. Now, obviously if there's other puppies or dogs around and she's afraid of dogs, I'm never going to ask her to bark, but I might ask her to *prrrp*.

So, I have behaviors that I know. Tugging is one, "search", if she won't tug and she won't search, she's over threshold. If she won't look for cookies when I tell her or take a cookie, I've made some big mistakes. So, where the empowerment circle overlaps the education circle, those are the behaviors that you know where your go-to to test how happy your puppy is.

Now a Venn diagram has three circles and that little sweet spot in the middle is going to tell you what environments, what behaviors, and what empowers the dog. And what your job is, is these circles are spread out and there's just this little sliver where they all overlap, your job is to bring them all together so I can do all my behaviors in all environments and I'm always feeling empowered and confident.

And you do that by trusting the dog, working at a distance. So, if you are going to a park and there's kids there, it might be, "We're just going to tug 50 feet away." We're going to do our *prrrp*, we're going to do our tugging and then we're going to leave.

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I always want to leave. That's one environment. We've had a really great outing. I was 50 feet away. I'm going to mark that down. Next time we might try 40 feet away, then maybe go to a hundred and grow that confidence. The puppy says, "I love this park! This is a great park, I do all my favorite things and we leave." You want to grow that and tilt when you say, "Well Susan, I want to have guests over at my house." For that, there's no formula that I can guarantee, but here's what I can suggest.

Start with your puppy in ex-pen or in their crate in your bedroom. Guests come in and you might have a remote feeder where you're feeding the puppy because they can hear those people. And then you're going to let the puppy out in the bedroom.

You might have a gate across the bedroom. You can see, test your empowerment behaviors. 'Can we do that there? No? Close the bedroom door. Can we do them in there? Yes, I know they're there. I don't have to look at them. They're fine.' Then you might go to your training den in the living room. That's why we create these training dens. These are dens of confidence. Now, can you do these skills in those two environments, bedroom and training den in the living room? We're not asking anybody to feed them.

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What we don't want is anyone to stare at them or make eye contact. So often people force puppies to be friends by saying, "feed my puppy" or "talk to my puppy." No. First of all, we want that puppy comfortable in any room with any child or any person, whatever they're normally fearful of.

Then you can play games how close can you get to those people? I like to even have the people facing away and I can go behind and play my games before I go in front where the eyeballs might look.

The worst thing is, [especially with kids](#), if they're afraid of kids. Because if kids see a fearful puppy, they tend to just stare and say nothing, which is the worst thing possible for a puppy. And so, getting people to line up and playing all these games behind, that's creating an environment that's confident for the puppy. And then yes, you can play search games where you're knocking the cookies off their feet. If the puppy's fine with that from behind, knock the cookie, search off the feet.



Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

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We might get them to do a [Hand Touch](#) and they touch your hand up against somebody's body, only if they're confident. So, if they're going in like, "I'm not sure." No, too far, too fast. Then you're going to get people sitting down and can they place 'search' with the people?

Eventually that puppy on their own may choose to go and visit, but it's never going to be forced. It's never going to be on your terms because we've empowered the puppy and we let them know, life happens when you are ready.

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So, my two-year-old dog was born in the year 2020. Ring a bell. Yeah, we were all in lockdown. She had a lot of these fears, and I did exactly this protocol to help her be confident. She's a two-and-a-half-year-old dog who loves people, who loves children. She was [not always that way](#). She was terrified of men, and she was terrified of children. Now, I probably have a little bit of the opposite problem, and I'm okay with that.

So let your puppy be empowered, use the protocol. And please jump over to YouTube, leave me a comment, let me know if this makes sense to you and if you try it, how it works for you and your puppy. And while you're there, give me a thumbs up on this video, will you? I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

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Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People

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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