

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Have you ever wondered why one dog could walk down a path on leash with their owner and pass dog after dog without really even blinking an eye and another dog could walk on leash on the same path and see like a single dog in the distance and absolutely lose it? Well if you have, then you're in for a treat because that is the topic of today's podcast episode.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Today we're going to talk about your dog's ability to regulate their emotions. And in podcast [episode number 217](#), I spoke about we need to sometimes help our dogs go from a place of dysregulation and through our help move through co-regulation to get to a place of self-regulation.

But honestly there's a fourth stage. And it's one where the dog has moved from needing to self-regulate to a place where they have habituated in that in my first example right off the top, the dogs walking by on the path are just white noise. "I don't need to self-regulate because I don't care." That's an ideal place. That's Nirvana.

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Is it possible for all dogs? Well, it really depends on where you're starting. And as I mentioned in podcast [episode number 218](#), it's dependent on the dog's age and the stage and any number of other things that go into how your dog responds when they are stressed. Because that's what self-regulation is.

It's the ability for a dog to feel an emotion, but not act on it. For them maybe wanting to do one thing but doing the opposite. And honestly, most dogs demonstrate that every day. When you might ask your dog say to move over on the couch, you want to sit in that spot. Now some dogs may just move. Some dogs may lightly bite you if you grab at their collar.

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Now that lightly biting is saying, "I'm [not happy with having to move](#), because I was all snuggled as a bug." But the lightly biting, even though ideally, we don't want our dogs to put our mouths on us, the lightly biting is an inhibited bite because every single dog out there can draw blood on you and I.

But their inhibited bite shows they are self-regulating. Now our goal is to have them self-regulating in more and more examples, but honestly, it's tough. And let's face it, it's even tougher for you and I because a lot of times the ability to self-regulate is dependent upon, well, the kind of day you've had. But generally speaking, are your physical, mental, and emotional needs being met?

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Because if one or all three of those aren't, it becomes increasingly difficult for you to think one thing and do the other. It becomes more and more difficult for the filter to stay in place on your mouth. With us humans, we can like logically say, "Listen, I'm a little bit edgy today, therefore I need to do this."

So, for me it might be meditate, get out in nature, walk my dogs, spend time hanging out with my dogs, possibly reading, and very likely some form of exercise.



Episode: #219

Self-Regulation Helping Shy, Hyper, Anxious Or Fearful Dogs To A Better Life

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Now the unconscious way us humans deal with the emotions we feel is eating, drugs, alcohol, scrolling on social media, maybe being one of those keyboard warriors, writing crap to people behind a screen. Really unhealthy things like mindlessly just watching Netflix series, after series, after series, or even you know, something's worse.

So, we as humans have a difficult time dealing with life if our physical, emotional, and mental needs and spiritual needs for us haven't been met. So, it's super important to be aware of the fact that what are my expectations for my dog?

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Are they a like lot higher than the expectations that I have for myself? So constantly keep that in the front of your mind. Are you being fair to your dog? Remember, our goal is to develop a relationship with this other species who is very social, who has needs very different than ours, and we're trying to get them to fit within the constructs of what we think life should look like.

We have to keep that in mind because it's not naturally just going to happen. Disney has portrayed that dogs have these crazy abilities to think and process and feel exactly the way we want them to. But that's not real life. You can go back and think about a dog in your past that, "Oh, life was so great. He did exactly what I wanted always."

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Well, here's the truth. Our memory kind of fades on the things that were difficult with that dog. Plus, the environment is very different today. There's a lot more going on. There's a lot more owners with their heads down looking at a screen and dogs being completely ignored. Plus, there's a lot more environmental factors like WiFis and fragrances and dyes and you name it.

So, there's a lot for our dogs to deal with. Now, right off the top, I just want to be clear. A dog showing any form of dysregulation is not a bad dog. It's not a weird dog. It's not a dog that needs to be dealt with.

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Dysregulation is the inability to manage emotions and that's to be expected. Especially with young puppies or with puppies or dogs who are in your home and haven't had clarity of expectations played out in a way that they want to do what you want them to do. And it is possible to get there. You'll see what I mean as I roll out what I have for you today.

So, dysregulation can show up in any number of ways. Often, it's an outward physical representation of an inward mental or emotional struggle. So, it could be a dog spinning or barking or lunging or humping or digging or yes, even biting. Here's the thing that I want you to be clear about.

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Dysregulation is not the same as [reactivity](#), although when a dog shares their emotions with you and you don't do anything about it, that dysregulation can escalate to a place of reactivity or even aggression. And that's why there's two things that I need you to be really clear about.

Number one, manage your expectations. Remind yourself of the stage and the age of your puppy and remind yourself of how much you understand about what I'm talking about. How much education have you sought out for yourself? Because remember, I've said this many times, the more educated you become about how dogs learn and how you can engage them, the more brilliant your dog will appear.



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So, number one, manage your expectations. Number two, learn to become aware of your dog's emotions. Now, I'm not saying for you to be able to identify, he's angry, he's happy, he's sad, because— I mean, there are times when it's obvious that our dog is really happy, but a lot of times we can't. We can't know what our dog's feeling. But what we can do is describe the behavior.

We can describe our dog's TEMP, [what their body looks like](#), and what are they doing. They're spinning in a circle on leash, barking hysterically, as a big, tall man walks by or a bicycle goes by, or a skateboard goes by, we can describe that behavior.

And by describing that behavior and keeping in mind behavior is communication, we can then say, "Wow, this isn't what I'd like to see from my dog. Here's where I think it could be different."

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And the gap between what your dog is doing, what you'd like to see, is [the training](#) that needs to be happening. So, a dog's outward expression of their inward emotion or struggle is going to be that dysregulation. A dog may show it because they're super excited, they're very hyper, or they may show it because they're unsure, they're afraid, they're fearful.

Or they could show it for any number of reasons in between. Maybe they're expecting something. It doesn't matter what. You just have those two things to do. Manage your expectations and become more aware of what your dog is communicating with their behavior.

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So, let's take for example, a dog that goes cray cray when they see a cat. You're walking down the street, they see a cat, they might start spinning or barking or lunging or clawing and like zero regard for you. They, my friend, are dysregulated.

So, what is it that we can do? We can again become aware of what's going on and instead of just holding on tight and walking through and hoping it goes away, we are going to have a plan.

What can I do right now to co-regulate? Well, you can be aware when you're walking your dog, not looking at your screens, but become aware. I see a cat over there, I'm going to cross the street. That's co-regulation 101. You have just helped your dog to stay in a place of more regulation by moving further away from the cat.

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Now a lot of people are going to say, "Yeah, now my dogs' self-regulating." No, no, you are still co-regulating. And here's a big problem is people co-regulate without a plan how to move from co-regulation to self-regulation for the dog.

So, it's great. I love it that you are thinking, "I'm going to cross the street because I see a cat up there." But don't think you have now created an opportunity for your dog to self-regulate. Self-regulating would be you don't change sides of the street. The dog looks at the cat goes, "Oh yeah, there's a cat." And then looks back at you. That's a great example of self-regulation.

We want to get there, but until we get there, there needs to be a strategic plan of what you're going to do, how you're going to achieve that, and what's in it for the dog? What are we replacing that with? And so, until we can get to that place, we're going to co-regulate. And that can look very, very different. If your dog's walking near the lawn and you see a cat on the front porch, you might put your dog on the other side.



Self-Regulation Helping Shy, Hyper, Anxious Or Fearful Dogs To A Better Life

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You might play a game of tug to get your dog's attention on you. Again, tug is great, but it isn't teaching your dog to self-regulate. It is co-regulating. And what you're really doing is you're distracting your dog to get them by that trigger.

And that's a hundred percent okay, but you need to move beyond co-regulation. And a lot of people don't. In my next podcast episode, I'm going to share with you three different case studies where you're going to see the downside of when people don't move from co-regulation to self-regulation, and how you end up with this lifelong project.

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You can never walk your dog by a cat. You can never leave your dog alone or they have a meltdown. And so that's what we need to do. We need to go from dysregulation, meaning your dog's expressing their emotion to a place of co-regulation, whatever that looks like, to get to a place where your dog can self-regulate, that means without props or behaviors from you, your dog says, "Yeah, boom. Got it."

And eventually we move to a place of a habituation, or what I call white noise land, where your dog's walking by cats and they're like, "Yeah, whatever, there's a cat so whatever. Doesn't mean anything to me anymore. Yeah, that was my old me."

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So, I remember years ago I used to take my horse out riding in the village where he was stabled, and it just so happened that Wednesdays were a late day for me, so I'd go out and take the horse out. And we would walk by row of row of houses with green garbage bags out because it was garbage day on Wednesday. That was no problem until recycling program came into effect here in Canada and then there were blue garbage bags on the street.

My horse had an epic meltdown. Skidded sideways because didn't you know, blue garbage bags actually eat horses. And so, I had to co-regulate until it was very easy with him because they were the same thing. So, I just took a garbage bag at the barn and just did some counterconditioning with him there.

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So that's an example of 'It's unexpected. What can I do right now?' Well, all that I did was I turned him around, we backed by it, and then we could move on our happy way. Right. So got by the blue garbage bag by backing away because then I'm not looking at it and I can do it.

So, know that sometimes your co-regulation is just a moment in time but take count of that behavior because it will show itself up somewhere else unless you say, "I'm going to go home and I'm going to work on this." Alright. So, what are some of the things that you can do? Here's my list of 10 things that you can do.

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Number one, make sure your dog has really good nutrition, the best nutrition that you can afford. Because the cheaper the quality of dog food you're giving, the more crap that's in it that is going to cause inflammation and is going to cause a dog's behavior to change.

Behavior and gut are related. If you don't believe me, go back and look at [episode number 203](#) where I share my story with my two-year-old dog This!.



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Now, any one of these top 10 things is not going to solve your problem. It's a joint affair. And I don't want to scare you. I don't want you to believe that you're a bad dog owner if you can't do it all. You do what you can do. Nutrition, do it the best you can afford. So, number one is [nutrition](#).

Number two is [exercise](#). Ideal world, your dog gets walked a minimum of twice a day, ideally for 20 minutes at a time with one off leash walk. And so, I know that might not be possible every day of the week, and you might not have an area that you could take them off leash.

Well, now there's more and more Sniffspots everywhere that you can drive to and book time to take your dog off leash. But that's a physical need. The ability to explore and run and just have fun in a big open area or an area with trees. It doesn't have to be open.

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Number three is a healthy environment. So, I hinted at it earlier where you don't have like artificial fragrances pumping out scents in your home. You consider what kind of pesticides you put topically on your dog or get to them to ingest. You just consider all of those things, because things like over vaccination, all of those things have the possibility of [affecting your dog's behavior](#).

So, consider them carefully before you do any of them. And for sure get rid of all the plugins scented, whatever that you have in your house. Not good for any of us. It's just crap.

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Number four, visit podcast [episode number 191](#) and teach your dog a relaxation protocol. Whether your dog is anxious and afraid, or your dog is overexcited, every dog should learn the value of relaxing away from a trigger.

So, we don't want you know, tell them, "Calm down, calm down, calm down," when they're in the midst of being dysregulated. We want them to enjoy, learn how good it feels to just be in this relaxation protocol. So, invest your time in teaching your dog a relaxation protocol or take it one further and go to podcast [episode number 200](#) and work through the FRIDA protocol.

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Number five, and this is a biggie, choice-based games. All of the training I do with my dogs is choice-based games. It's empowering the dog. And what it really does is somewhere in the midst of this, the dog will be challenged to make a tough decision.

What is dysregulation? Remember off the top, it's when there's internal conflict, what you want your dog to do and what your dog emotionally is invested in doing. There is a conflict.

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And so, if we rehearse training that we're constantly telling the dog, "It's your choice. You can do what you want." Now it sounds all loosey-goosey, but let me share with you, and this is something I haven't mentioned a lot on the podcast. Unlike a lot of professional trainers, especially trainers that choose to use more coercion in their training, every single dog I have ever owned in my entire life has won a national or world championship in at least one dog sport, every single dog.

Which means I haven't come up against a dog where I'm, "Oh, this one doesn't work." Now, I'm excluding the Bulldog rescue in that scenario because I've never really done dog sports with him. If I come up against a challenge, I know it's not who the dog is, it's who I am as a trainer.



Episode: #219

Self-Regulation Helping Shy, Hyper, Anxious Or Fearful Dogs To A Better Life

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And so, by saying that to you, I'm telling you I have been training my dogs exclusively with games that allow them to [make choices that empower them](#) to guide their own life. And it sounds like there's no rules, but there's very clear rules.

My dogs live with extreme clarity, and it can be exactly the same for you and your dog. The key to remember, [positive is not permissive](#). Yes, my dogs live in a world rich in positive reinforcement, but that doesn't mean they run amuck. Game-based training, point number five, super, super important.

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Number six, sleep. So many people have their dogs scheduled every night to do something, and the dog is like on a timetable. We're doing this, we're doing that, we're doing this. Every dog has their own requirements for downtime, just like every person has their own requirements for downtime.

Don't assume that your dog is just going to sleep when you go to bed at night. Evaluate your dog's needs. What do they need? How long? What does that look like? Is it away? Put them away from you. Can they sleep away from you?

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That brings me to point number seven, [strategic alone time](#). I see a lot more people who entertain their dogs anytime they're home. The dogs are pestering them to do something, and they do it.

A dog needs to understand that you have your grownup time and then there's dog time. We need to get to a place where they're a hundred percent comfortable and happy just chilling, hanging out, and waiting until it's dog time.

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Point number eight, cooperative teamwork. This is related to the choice-based training and the relaxation protocol. My dogs are allowed to tell me, "I'm not comfortable with this." And their behavior, maybe they walk away and sniff, their behavior will tell me there's a problem either in the environment that I've put them in or in the training that I thought I did.

And so, my dogs, whether I'm cutting their nails or I'm going to train a game in the building, their behavior is communication to me whether they are on board with what I'm doing, and they have the right to show me that I haven't done a good enough job to move forward with what we're doing.

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Point number nine, [journal](#) my friends. Journal, journal, journal. When you see a dysregulated behavior, write down the time of day it was, what the dog did, what led up to that (the thing before the thing), what else might have happened during the day, I mean things you might not even think about.

Like it could have been the dog was at the groomers yesterday or the day before, or the dog was at the veterinarians, or you change their shampoo, or there's things that you might not realize what what's important. But you just want to record keep as much as you can.

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How long was it since they ate last, and what did they eat last? So, you're going to write down all the things that you can about that incident then write down what you did. Super important. We may not act in our best if it's a surprise, but you can improve on what you did, a hundred percent. The last thing you're going to do is your next steps.



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What are you going to do now that you know you've seen this dysregulation? What are you going to do to help grow your dog's ability to self-regulate if that scenario happens in the future? So, journaling is your best friend.

And closely related and point number 10 is [videoing your training](#) and having a proven strategic plan to follow through with. Yes, for me every dog I've ever owned has been raised on Recaller games. And so far, they haven't let me down. So, I mentioned this in our last podcast episode, and I'm going to put it out there one more time. And this will be it for a long time.

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If you're listening to this and you say, "Well, I do play games. I get a couple games from this person, and I get a couple from I see on Facebook, and then I try to—." You need strategic layers. You need the ability to teach your dog how to make good choices.

And so right now I'm going to offer the opportunity either our flagship, if this is possible for you, Recallers program or our Home School the Dog program, both of them have games. You can write to my team at wag@dogsthat.com with a subject line "My dog needs better choices." And we'll help you start that game-based training that will empower your dog.

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Because here's what happens most of the time. People think, "Oh, he'll outgrow it." Or people think, "Well, I'm just going to tell him, 'No, don't do that' and he'll figure it out." Skill, will, or environment, if you don't put in the time to teach your dogs the skills they need to live in your world, the constructs of what you expect from them, then what's going to happen is you are going to assume it's will when he chases the rabbit or when he goes crazy at the cat.

You're going to assume it's him blowing you off. But in fact, the [environment always wins](#). The things that I mentioned that we really need to give our dog, really good nutrition. Sure, environment will give him snacks.

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Exercise, hey, up and down hills, chasing, hunting, training that empowers the dog and gives them challenge. Hey, bunnies will do that, so will squirrels. A healthy environment, including enrichment, so it's not just getting rid of the toxins, it's adding enrichment to that dog's environment.

And so, they do have an outlet if they like to shred their beds. That isn't shredding toys or beds. If you don't give those things to your dog, the environment is always willing to step up for you. Which is why people end up in such a cluster because they don't consider the power of the environment.

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They don't consider that the dog doesn't have the skill that they're expecting. All that they buy in to the narrative that the trainers that say, "Your dog's just being stubborn, willful, disobedient, dominant, he needs a good correction, he needs that." And the beauty is dogs will put up with that. But should they have to? We can regulate our emotions. Let's help our dogs to regulate theirs.

And it is possible. Am I saying all dogs could be that dog walking down the street ignoring the cats? No, but I'm saying a hundred percent it is possible for your dog to get to a better place. We've seen some crazy cat chasers in our Recaller program go to a place of "Yeah, I can regulate my emotions. I can function around cats. It's not a problem."





Episode: #219

Self-Regulation Helping Shy, Hyper, Anxious Or Fearful Dogs To A Better Life

00:23:53

It absolutely is possible for you and your dog to get to a better place. In the next episode, I'm going to walk you through some case studies of how of exactly what it looks like in that co-regulation with a strategic thought of getting the dog to a place of self-regulation.

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

Recallers and Home School the Dog:

Contact us at wag@dogsthat.com with the subject line **My Dog Needs Better Choices**

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 217: Understanding Emotional Regulation In Dogs To Create Calm](#)

[Podcast Episode 218: Puppy Development Stages And Your Dog's Behavior](#)

[Podcast Episode 82: Resource Guarding in Puppies: When Your Puppy Biting Seems Aggressive](#)

[Podcast Episode 29: Understanding and Preventing Reactivity and Aggression in Your Dog](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 172: How To Teach Your Dog Anything With My Training Plan](#)

[Podcast Episode 203: Reactive, Unmotivated and Fearful: Finding Resiliency For This! Beyond Dog Training Part 1](#)

[Podcast Episode 204: Dog Behavior And Diet: Recovery For This! Beyond Dog Training Part 2](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Exercising Your Dog's Body and Mind: Tips and Games with Susan Garrett](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 191: Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation](#)

[Podcast Episode 200: Solve Your Dog's Separation Anxiety With FRIDA: Expanding Calm With Functional Relaxation](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Mastery of Positive Reinforcement Based Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 198: What Does "Positive Is Not Permissive" Really Mean In Dog Training?](#)

[Podcast Episode 98: Puppy Home Alone: Are You Creating Chaos or Calm?](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 197: Outsmarting Distractions: How To Use Environmental Reinforcement in Dog Training](#)



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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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