

Empowering The Next Generation Of Dog Lovers: Finya's School Assignment

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

00:00:00

Something you may not know about me is I love kids. I am particularly keen on kids who have an interest in dogs and those who are curious about training dogs well, I'm all in.

And so, when a 10th grader from Louisiana asked me to answer a few questions to help her out with a school assignment, I said, "Let's go!"

00:00:28

Hi, I am Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. When I got these questions from Finya, I said, "Hey, do you mind if I shared this on a podcast?" And she thought that would be a lot of fun.

I thought it was important because I think they're great questions, but I also think as a community of dog lovers, it's super important that we have a pulse on the feelings and the thought processes and the curiosities of an up-and-coming dog trainer.

00:00:54

Now, I'm going to preface this by saying I don't know Finya personally, I did meet her when I was in Houston competing at an agility trial there. Her Australian Shepherd Vapor came second to This! in one of the classes that we ran down there.

So, I know she has an interest in dog agility. Obviously, she loves dogs, and she has a curiosity to learn more, and that's why she reached out to me.

00:01:18

And so that's all the background that I know, and here are the questions that Finya had for me. Number one, "*What are the beneficial factors you see in positive reinforcement?*" And I had to ask Finya for some follow up information on some of these questions. But that one I'm like, how do I answer that?

00:01:36

To me, asking what the benefits of positive reinforcement, is like asking what's the benefit of oxygen. It's just that important. You know, when most people start out training a dog, reinforcement is like a tool in the toolbox that we can use reinforcement [as a lure](#) to get behavior, for prompt behavior. We can [use reinforcement](#) to reinforce a behavior well done. But there's other tools we might have in that toolbox.

00:02:01

Now for me, as my dog training journey evolved, reinforcement became less of a tool and more of who I was. So, it's a lens that I look through the world with. It may have started with my love and passion in helping my dogs to be brilliant, but it's something I strive to look through every single day in every single circumstance.

Not just with dogs, but with people, with everybody I deal with in my life. When you approach training this way it creates a bond with your dog that is so deep because your primary focus is about how to make this dog have an amazing life. How to help this dog have more freedoms.



Empowering The Next Generation Of Dog Lovers: Finya's School Assignment

00:02:43

Does the dog not have [a great recall](#)? Therefore, I have to keep her on leash? How can I use the reinforcement in this dog's life? How can I manipulate environments?

How can I make sure that the dog has this clear understanding of what their name means? And that I always want them to turn on a dime and fly back to me. And I want to do that only with reinforcement.

00:03:03

So, what are the benefits of reinforcement training? It allows you to always show up as your best self, to be the most empathetic, the most self-aware, the kindest. The kind of person that anybody would love to spend time with. The kind of person that the dog wakes up every morning and says, "She is my person how awesome is that?!"

I think that's the benefits of reinforcement. In my world I believe that dogs are always doing the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment that we've put them in.

00:03:36

So, if they make a mistake, [they don't deserve punishment](#). They don't deserve us being frustrated or disappointed by them because it would mean we are frustrated or disappointed in ourselves because the dog is just who we made them to be.

00:03:51

And yes, people listening to this might say, "Oh, but [I have a rescue dog](#) therefore it's somebody else's baggage." Well, your rescue dog is doing the best they can with the education they've been given in the kind of upside down, topsy-turvy life that they've had to live.

That dog needs more grace than any dog. I mean, I think all dogs need maximum amount of grace, but if you're going to dial it down for anybody, it should be for a rescue dog.

00:04:13

And so, your rescue dog is a reflection of your ability to bring out the best in a rescue dog without hanging onto baggage, without saying, "Well, this one need to be trained differently because he was raised differently." That's a very long answer to "What are the benefits that I see in reinforcement?" It's just, it's life. It's everything.

00:04:32

Next question, "*Where do you draw the line between training tools, techniques and abuse?*" I used to say the dog is the one who will tell us that what's being abusive or what's being unkind.

But the truth is, there are dogs who can look like they want to leave training and they're being trained with a cookie but maybe the application of reinforcement is so confusing for the dog because of the limited experience or mechanics of the trainer. That dog just looks like they're afraid and they want to get out of here.

00:05:05

Likewise, there are dogs trained with prong collars, chain collars, [electric collars](#) that look like they're having a great time because their trainer has this great gift of timing and maybe long, lengthy experiences.

So, I don't believe it's solely the dog who will tell us.



Empowering The Next Generation Of Dog Lovers: Finya's School Assignment

00:05:24

You know, when I first started teaching classes here, I think it was 1998, and I knew I had a very small window that I could teach, I still had a full-time job. And I knew people who came to my puppy class were going to go off to other classes in the neighborhood. And no other classes were going to have the approach to training that we had here. So, I knew those dogs were going to leave here and get collar corrected.

00:05:47

And so, part of our early curriculum was shaping the puppy's tolerance to a [tug on their collar](#) in a playful way. They're in the middle of tugging and you'll just tug on their collar a little bit, little bit more tugging, little tugging on the collar till eventually you could pop on the collar and [the dog would still tug](#) and they wouldn't stop tugging. And so that dog left here and went to another class and if somebody popped them with a correction, the dog's ears would still stay up and they'd still stay bright.

00:06:13

As long as a person doing the correcting wasn't also adding harsh [emotional trauma](#) to the dog, the dog probably would look happy. But does that mean that training with physical corrections or aversives of any kind is something that everybody should do if they do it the right way? I don't think so.

00:06:30

It's such a loaded question. It's a great question Finya, but the truth is any dog training tool can be abusive. Dogs have been abused well just on a flat collar and leash. Dogs can be spun around while in a body harness. Any tool. You can throw [a clicker](#) at a dog and hurt them, maybe hit them in the eye. Okay, it'd have to be really heavy clicker. Maybe you whipped it hard, and you got them in a soft spot, I don't know.

00:06:56

Pretty much any tool in dog training can be abusive. So more than the tools themselves being abusive, I think it's the intention of the human. You know, some trainers believe that every dog needs to know "*they have to do it or else.*" Every dog will have their 'come to Jesus' moment where they really need to be you know, dominated because that's the way dog training is.

00:07:21

And I've got to tell you, I've been a professional dog trainer for more than 30 years. I have yet to find that. I have yet to find the dog that doesn't respond to the [manipulation of environment](#) and good old-fashioned reinforcement-based dog training. I have yet to find that dog.

And I have trained in our online programs, tens of thousands of dogs. And I've trained thousands before I started teaching in the online space. So, I believe that it's the intention of the person. If you are trying to do something to create the potential for pain in a dog, then that is in my opinion abusive. And it could be emotional pain. It could be like agility competitors who yell at the dog or for [knocking a bar](#) or picking them up and carrying them out of the ring. I just don't think that's necessary.

00:08:10

But I promise you there was a point in my life I did pick up dogs and carry them out of the ring. The more I've focused on being a curious dog trainer and focused on all the different ways I could use reinforcement in my training, the less I've needed to use any form of punishment or [a timeout](#) in my training.



Empowering The Next Generation Of Dog Lovers: Finya's School Assignment

00:08:30

Alright, this is a question that I had to ask for more clarification on. I guess just because probably Finya's background and mine are so different. But I'm glad she asked it because I love to be opened up to different insights. I love to become aware and to different backgrounds of where people are coming from.

00:08:48

"Have you noticed beginners in the dog sport world being confused or scared due to what they've heard or learned from the public and their ideas that training is abuse?"

So, when I first read that I thought, well, I know some like PETA people think any kind of dog training is abusive. But I thought, rather than assume that I'd ask for more clarification.

00:09:09

And so, what Finya said was, "Several people I have met who started training dogs were so used to the way of heavy handling the dogs where they would pop them very hard, or even hit the dog. What I'm asking is, have you ever helped a beginner and they were so afraid to do it wrong and possibly have people think they were forcing or hurting the dog?"

So, as you can imagine Finya having listened to this episode so far, that's not something that I teach. In 1988, I was introduced to collar corrections on a chain collar. And I saw a lot of the methodology that you are talking about now through the late Eighties and early Nineties.

00:09:50

But by 1993, I had moved away from that. By 1996, it was gone. And so, have I seen young people who are afraid to train because they're afraid of making mistakes? I've seen some [really poor coaching](#). Regardless if you're teaching a young person to correct a dog or apply an aversive. Which I just can't imagine doing that.

Because what is the message that we're sending to the young people? *"When something that's weaker than us does something we don't like, we have the right to do this to them."* I just think that's such a horrible message.

00:10:24

You know, we're living in an awakening time when we can be empathetic to everybody's, every being's needs, every living being on this planet. And so, I just can't imagine trying to teach a young person how to apply an aversive to a dog so that they will listen to you. It's just not something that I would like to see.

But I have seen even reinforcement-based people coaching in a way that makes those people feel less than. I know 25 years ago I was one of those people. And so, if you're training dogs and you have a great skill and a great love of training dogs, I encourage you to become equally passionate about reaching people, coaching in a way that makes them feel better rather than patting or feeding your own ego.

00:11:18

And so, a lot of times young people get afraid to try something, even if it's a reinforced-based process because they're afraid that failing isn't a good thing. Failing should be embraced. Nobody should ever be afraid to try anything that is going to bring more joy to a dog's life. Okay, Finya's next questions.



Empowering The Next Generation Of Dog Lovers: Finya's School Assignment

00:11:40

"What are your thoughts on people who use electric collars, prong collars, and leash pops?" You know my thoughts on the people are, everybody's welcome here. I love curious people who want to learn how to apply reinforcement in a way that they don't ever have to use electric collars, [leash pops, or prong collars](#).

And as I mentioned, it's possible. It doesn't matter what your training, it doesn't matter who will insist I'm wrong. There are more and more and more dog trainers out there that will prove to you that I am right, that you don't need that.

00:12:21

If you are a reinforcement-based dog trainer, the worst thing you could do is make somebody who comes to you training with an electric collar or leash pops or prong collars, the worst thing you could do is make them feel judged. Because you can never help somebody while you're judging them. You just can't. You're going to put them in [their back brain](#). They're going to get defensive. They're going to feel embarrassed. They're going to feel less than.

00:12:44

So, if you are a person who currently uses any form of a correction, a physical correction with your dog, I hope that you're curious enough to do a deep dive into some of these older podcasts that I have here.

And be sure to ask a question, come over to YouTube and leave me a comment and ask a question knowing that you're in a place of safety. There are no questions that you could ask that you will ever be judged for asking.

00:13:08

And final question from Finya. *"When dealing with a dog who does not respond as well as you would like to positive reinforcement, what do you turn to for help?"* Alright, number one thing I turn to for help Finya is [my video](#). Because dog training is a mechanical skill in that a dog can only be as good as the trainer's mechanics.

And so, I'll look at my mechanics and now maybe even get somebody else to look at them and say, "What do you think I was trying to achieve here?" Because if you can't see it, my dog couldn't see it either.

00:13:43

I'll then look at [my training plan](#). Have I broken things down into the small enough pieces? Where was the confusion? Is there joy? Did I get a joyful dog to start? And was I training in an environment that was suitable for [that dog's age and stage of training](#)?

Meaning if I had a young Jack Russell puppy and I wanted to work on a recall, [I wouldn't go to a bunny farm for that](#). Because the environment would be screaming the puppy's name. Environmental has all the power until we, through our great use of reinforcement, turn off the power of the environment, neutralizing it all as white noise, growing the focus for us.

00:14:23

So, if I had [a dog who wasn't responding to reinforcement](#), number one it would be the health of the dog. Make sure get that dog to the veterinarian. Make sure there's no way that that dog's in pain. Okay, so that's my number one.



Empowering The Next Generation Of Dog Lovers: Finya's School Assignment

00:14:35

Number two is my video. Number three is my training plan. And then number four would be my mentor. If I still am stumped, I will go out and ask. I mean, that's how I got solutions to my young girl This! when I just [didn't know how to help her](#). I just started asking people whose opinion I respect in the dog training world, "What do you think?" And lo and behold, I stumbled on [nutrition is a big part of it](#).

00:15:02

And so that's all the questions. Finya, thank you for asking and thank you for agreeing to be part of the podcast. And those of you who are listening, I'd love for you to jump over to YouTube, write some comments to Finya. Encourage her to keep going on her journey in dog training and I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 175: Food Luring VS Shaping In Dog Training: How Science Changed How I Teach Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 205: The Hidden World Of Reinforcement For Dogs And Why You Need To Know](#)

[YouTube Video: How To Get Your Dog To Listen Off Leash \(Step By Step Guide\)](#)

[Podcast Episode 102: Transitioning Your Dog Training: From All That Is Wrong To That Which Is Right](#)

[Podcast Episode 78: How To Train a Rescue Dog with Behavior Problems](#)

[Podcast Episode 214: England Banned Shock Collars, Here's Why That Could Be Sad News](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 89: Why Dogs Should Not Tug: The Truth Revealed](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 69: Clicker Training: Will It Work For Every Dog?](#)

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

[Blog Post: The Top 10 Reasons Agility Dogs Drop Bars](#)

[Podcast Episode 34: Time Outs for Dogs: Does Your Dog Need One?](#)

[Podcast Episode 142: Giving And Receiving Constructive Feedback About Your Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 134: How To Teach A Dog Stay WITHOUT Luring, Collar Pops Or Using The Word "Stay"](#)

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

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

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

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

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

[Podcast Episode 99: When Reinforcement Based Dog Training Doesn't Work](#)

[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](#)



Empowering The Next Generation Of Dog Lovers: Finya's School Assignment

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>

