

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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Recently I sat down and as I was reading through the list of questions for an ['ask me anything' podcast](#), I realized how many questions that were on the topic of fear in dogs. And I thought, hey, this needs to be a podcast topic all on its own and here we have it.

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I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And as a matter of fact, when I started preparing this podcast episode, I realized this is not going to all fit into one episode. So welcome to part one of a two-part episode on identifying and overcoming fear in your dog.

Today I want to detail the main reasons why there may be fear in a dog and three reasons that I think are huge that often people don't even consider and how you can help mitigate some of those things that are happening to your dog that are causing potentially unnecessary fears.

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So, some fears are just going to happen. For example, most puppies are going to go through what they call [a fear period](#) and often two fear periods. And during those fear periods, they're not going to be at their confident best. What can we do about it? You need to know what is your dog's normal. [Read their T.E.M.P.](#) When are they absolutely— well let's call it homeostasis, they are calm and content.

What are the signs in their physical body that they will show you that physical body represents what's happening internally. Because if you can identify when that puppy is relaxed and calm, then you can identify when they are alert, and then from alert we'll go one of two directions.

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It may go to excited, "Is that my daddy?!" Or it could go to anxious, "That's not my daddy. I don't know who that is! Awool!" From that anxious, it can go in any number of directions leading all the way up to [reactivity or potentially even aggression](#).

So, knowing what is normal calm for your dog, what is normal happy, what is normal alerting, what is normal excitement, what is over aroused? Identifying all those states in your puppy and recognizing what's normal, that's what's going to help move you through your puppy's fear period with as little of impact on you, and more importantly, with a little impact on that puppy.

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Because knowing what those things are, you can during those times, apply the process that I'm going to give you to help minimize your dog's reacting in a negative way when they get [overly excited](#) or anxious or worse. So, fear periods, it may or may not be something that happens. Now related to that is the genetics. So, some breeds are just more confident than other breeds. It's what they've been bred to do.

For example, you could take a sheep herding breed like a Border Collie that's bred to herd sheep, and they're generally going to be less confident than a guardian breed, a dog that's bred to look out for the bad guys and protect those sheep. The guardian breeds are to be just more confident. So, genetics, the breed of dog will play a role in how confident they are or how much fear that they will show.



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Now within each breed, you're going to see wide variation. I've seen fearful Golden Retrievers. Generally, you see very confident Golden Retrievers. The gamut is within each breed. So, is it supposed to be that way? Probably not, but there's some great breeders. There's some not-so-great breeders. And guess what, there's some just stuff happens within any breed.

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So, it could be your dog's fear period. It could be the genetics of the breed. It could also be what's called generational trauma. Something that happened to one or another parent that gets passed down. And there's actually been studies on this where they did these studies with rats, where they fed rats watermelon and shocked them when they were eating the watermelon. That's kind of mean, I know.

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But they did that enough so that when rats smelled watermelon, they got incredibly anxious. They wanted nothing to do with watermelon and they were, you know, breaking out in a cold sweat for a rat, whatever those physical signs of stress were in the rat. Now here's the interesting part of the study. They then took those rats who if they just smelled watermelon, they had a meltdown and they bred them to completely normal rats.

And the offspring were also afraid of the smell of watermelon. They did this a second generation with those rats who had never even been exposed to the shock and the watermelon. They bred them to other healthy rats and guess what? The fear of the watermelon was also passed down.

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So, why would that be? Because there are things that if they can hurt us, we need to be aware of and generationally we're wired to not have to experience that ourselves because you know, we might die. So, that's how generational trauma can get passed in the DNA. Whether it's fears that make sense or fears that don't make sense, they can still be passed along.

So, related to genetics, but not necessarily strictly genetics. Number four would be the lack of [proper early education](#) from the time that the puppies were born all the way up until they were eight, nine, ten weeks old, and they went to their new homes.

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Now they actually have shown that puppies raised in a deprived environment, meaning they weren't given proper stimulation, [proper socialization](#), [proper exposures](#) to different sounds and touches and experiences, those puppies will always grow into be jumpier adults amongst other things.

So, dogs that are, you know, like feral raised under a shed and never even come in contact with humans, obviously they have horrific fears where humans are concerned. But even if they're raised with humans, but they just aren't given a very good early education, [those dogs will be jumpier](#).

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Now there is unfortunate incidences that happen to dogs and that can lead to fears. For example, if a puppy is [jumped or badly beaten up by a certain dog](#), they may develop phobias and fears to maybe dogs of that color or dogs of that breed.

It doesn't mean just because your puppy was jumped, they're going to have this fear. My dog Swagger was very badly beaten up when he was six months old by a mostly black Border Collie.



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And I worked very hard over the next six months to help him overcome that incident. And he grew up to be an adult dog who had no problem with any dog of any color or any breed. He's just a great dog who gets along with other dogs.

However, abuse at the hands of humans, people that the dog should trust, abuse could just be like a lot of yelling or screaming or ranting or worse, like throwing things or hitting, et cetera, et cetera. Abuse could lead to fears that are what you're seeing in your animal now, may or may not be real.

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So, if [you have a rescue dog](#) and your dog is, say afraid of tall men, don't immediately assume that that dog was abused. Chances are it wasn't. Chances are it's one of those other things that I've already mentioned. So, what happens is when people get a rescue dog and the dog shows fear of something, people make up these stories in their head and that holds the dog back from getting help.

That holds you back from working any further because you've decided, "Oh, that's what it is. I don't have to do anything." No. I'm giving you these lists of reasons of why you might be seeing, not so that you could say, "Well, I guess that's it. I don't have to do anything."

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Just to explain the basis of what you might be seeing. It really isn't that relevant to the steps we're going to be taking afterwards. I just find behavior in general is super interesting. Number six, reason number six, and this is one that I bet many of you would have never heard of. And that is there are medical conditions that will increase what you will see in fear.

For example, thyroid, any kind of a [thyroid problem](#) could present as a sudden onset fear. As can, believe it or not, bladder or kidney infections can also have a sudden onset fear to the point where a dog may shake or be afraid of things, they previously were never afraid of before.

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So, there are other medical conditions, I just gave you two, that could make your dog afraid of things they weren't afraid of before. And number seven, and I don't want to scare you, if you have a female dog that has been spayed, spaying can actually increase fear, anxiety, and reactivity in female dogs.

Now, the reason is when you spay a female, you have taken away their hormones, two very important hormones, oxytocin and estrogen are responsible for the dog feeling confident and happy. And when you take away their sex organs, you drastically diminish both of those hormones. And the other thing that happens is you increase something called the luteinizing hormone. And that's the hormone that tells the dog's sex organs to release their eggs.

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'Okay, we're about to go through our cycle now' boom, the brain sends the message down to the body, gets down to the ovaries to let's get going, let's get busy. Once an animal's been spayed, then there's nothing there to turn off that luteinizing hormone.

And it has been suggested in research that it's not only responsible for increased fear, anxiety, and reactivity. Potentially also a spayed female may have 30 times the LH production that an unsplayed bitch would. And that could be responsible for heightened level of various different kinds of cancers as well.



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So, what can you do? It doesn't mean you're doomed if you have a female that's been spayed. You can talk to your veterinarian about getting hormone replacement for your female if you are seeing the symptoms of increased agitation, anxiety, aggression. The last three reasons why we may be seeing fear in dogs. And these three, again, may be things you have not considered.

Number one, you've heard me talk about this a lot, and that is nutrition. If you refer to [podcast number 203 and 204](#) where I talked about my young dog This! and how she had so much fear, so much anxiety as a youngster and how almost overnight it was diminished by at least half when I changed her food.

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But gut-brain relationship is very well known both in dogs and particularly in humans. And so, if the dog's microbiome is not a good one, then it absolutely could be responsible for the fear that you're seeing in your dog.

So, what I did with Thissy is number one, I decreased the level of protein she was getting, increased the level of green leafy vegetables in the form of a smoothie, fruits, and starchy vegetables. And of course, really good omega 3 fats.

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Now this could be a little controversial, and if you are a part of the farming community, I raise my hands to you. However, food production today is about getting the biggest yields, the most production and products and produce that are the most resistant to the chemicals that get put on our food.

It is not about how digestible that food is in our guts or in our dog's guts. So, that could also be contributing to why our dog's nutrition isn't the same as it possibly was previously.

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Reason number two that may not be considered, and that is the electrical environment that our dogs are living in today. Now dogs are definitely very, very [sensitive to energies](#). If you've ever put a magnetic coat on a dog, I've seen so many different responses just in my own dogs over the past 30 years when I've put any kind of magnetic coat or coat that has energy going through it. Even red-light therapy on my dogs.

Some dogs completely relax with it. Some dogs freeze up. They definitely are more sensitive to it than humans are. So, think of how many electromagnetic frequencies are now surrounding our own environments. Yes, there's things like fluorescent lights, dimmer switches actually add to electromagnetic, the EMFs in your environment.

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Things like, "Hey Siri," or "Hey Google," or "Alexa". All of these things that are in our environments that never were before. There is a theory that those EMFs are playing a role in how our dogs process things through their brain, process what they are seeing in their environment, and how they express those process feelings [in their emotional states](#), in their fearfulness, in their reactivity.

The tenth thing I want you to consider about fear in your dogs is you. This is a biggie. And I have a video. If you're listening to this podcast, I want you to jump over to YouTube because I'm going to share a video that I promise you I have been given permission to share because it is a little bit of a personal video. And I'm going to share a video of Kim walking Belief.



### Understanding Dog Fear (Part 1): Genetics, Trauma, And Your Dog's Well-being

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Now Kim, as many of you know, works here at DogsThat Central, works here with me, has worked here for nine years. So, I know her very, very well. She lives here with me four days of the week, and then she goes home for three days a week. So, I've gotten to know Kim extremely well over the years. And I know she has some anxieties in life.

Hey, don't we all? One of them for Kim is an extreme fear of heights. Now, it's something I don't understand. I don't have a fear of heights, but I've gotten to understand Kim's fear a little bit better in that if she's walking over a high height, for example, we walked the canopy in the rainforest when we were in Costa Rica.

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It was, I don't know how many meters above the ground, we were way up in the air, but below were trees. We were walking along the treetops and therefore she wasn't afraid. However, when we were walking in Italy along a cliff's edge where there was a barrier up, it didn't matter. There was an edge that she could see and there weren't trees below, she was paralyzed. She dropped to the ground. She couldn't move.

Why am I telling you about this? Because recently Kim and I were hiking in Québec City. And I had two of my dogs with me, Momentum and This!, and she was walking Belief. We came to a part where we had to walk across a suspension bridge. A suspension bridge is there's two big anchors, and then there's nothing below that's holding that bridge.

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Meaning it just kind of wobbles a little bit while you walk. And it's way up above the ground and you can see a valley below. I think there was a small river below. We got to that bridge, and I said to Kim, "We can turn around if you want." She goes, "No, no, no, no. I did this in Costa Rica. I can pretend that there's trees below."

At that time there was nobody else around in that park. So, I walked across first, and I waited, and Kim took her time, and she made it across. No problem. Her and Belief were fine. Now on the way back at the end of our walk, the park was crowded, and she had more anxiety.

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She said, "What if I get there and I have to pass somebody? I can't go to an edge. I have to stay in the middle." I said, "They'll understand Kim, just ask them to go around." And I said to her, "Do you want me to take Belief with me?" And she said, "No, no, no, no, I'll be fine."

So, as she started on the walk, as you can see in this video, she was feeding Belief. She wasn't super confident herself, but she was feeding Belief and walking along. And then when people started to approach, Kim got more anxious.

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She brought her hands to her temples to try to block out the view of the sides. And then you won't be able to hear it on the video, but she started to make an audible noise of somebody who is afraid. She started to make this noise as she was walking along. With each symptom she showed to me, the third one being her steps got very short and stiff. With each of these three symptoms, I saw Belief's [body language](#) change as well. Belief's T.E.M.P. changed. Her tail got lower, her body got roachier, she started dropping to the ground. She was feeling the fear that Kim was demonstrating.



# Understanding Dog Fear (Part 1): Genetics, Trauma, And Your Dog's Well-being

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Now, this isn't news to anybody. I've talked about Dr. Biagio in Italy at the University of Naples, where he proved that dogs can sense happy and they can sense terrified. And I talked about this in [podcast number 62](#). And Belief demonstrated this beautifully. And once Kim saw that, she was able to realize that there are things I can do.

So, you can't overcome your fears overnight, but you can stop talking about them as if they have control on you. You can start talking in a confident way to your dogs. You don't feed your dog's fear with [your own anxiety](#) about those fears.

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So, now in times when Kim might think Belief would be worried, instead of going, "Oh, she's going to do this." She'll go, "Come on, BB! We're going to go here. We're going to do this." She talks in a very confident way. I've seen a shift in Kim. And that's one thing you can do.

So, to wrap up today. We have 10 reasons why your dog might be showing signs of fear. Here's what I'd like you to do to prepare for the next episode. Number one, recognize what is your dog's T.E.M.P. What does your dog look like when they are in complete homeostasis? When they are the most relaxed, the most content, what does that look like?

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And just know that a dog's tail wagging super-fast doesn't mean that they're happy. A dog flipping upside down and wagging their tail doesn't always mean that they want their belly rubbed. It could mean that they're very worried about you and they're just [showing a little bit of anxiety](#). Now, my dog Momentum she flips upside down and wags her tail a lot. She definitely wants her belly rubbed. But not all dogs are showing that.

So, know your dog, write down 'complete homeostasis, this is what it looks like.' When my dog is alerting, just curious, do I see something over there? What does that look like? When they are now anxious? What do their ears do? What does the hair up the back of their neck do? Or at their tail head? What does the tail do?

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Start journaling what your dog does when they are alert, when they're excited, when they are overexcited, [when they are anxious](#), when they are fearful, [when they are reacting](#). Write down as much information as you can about each one of those states. It's super important that you know that.

Now, yourself. What are the things that trigger you? It could be something as simple as a loose dog charging your dog. Do you go, "What are you doing, you jerk! Come and get your dog!" Think of the video clip that I showed you here today, because that anger, that anxiety, that emotion, that [red lining emotion](#) that you are allowing to spew out of you is not just going out to the person who owns that loose dog.

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It's internalizing within you, and it's going right down your leash to your dog. So, think about any situations that you could be in. Conversations at home that cause a spark and cause an eruption of anger. Any situations that you could work hard at, that you could now start applying yourself to create a trigger to change that. It's not only going to benefit your dog. I promise you my friend, it's going to benefit your health in the long run.



# Understanding Dog Fear (Part 1): Genetics, Trauma, And Your Dog's Well-being

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In our next podcast episode, I'm going to do a deep dive into a different approach that I have to overcoming fear in my dogs. You know, if you Google or go to YouTube and you do a search for fearful dogs, you'll likely find I don't know, hundreds of videos that will talk about either flooding, meaning pushing that dog out of their comfort zone. "They need to learn how to." No. Oh, please no. Or you'll find the odd video that talks about giving cookies, "Lots of cookies, lots of cookies. That's going to help you."

My approach doesn't take either one of those. And I want to share it with you because I've helped a number of not just my dogs, but my students' dogs overcome both overexcitement, fear, anxiety, and reactivity using this approach. And that's coming up next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 235: AMA With Susan Garrett: Leash Lunging, Dog Anxiety, Agility Angst, Bad Breeders, And More](#)

[Podcast Episode 199: Puppy Fear Periods: Help For Socializing Puppies Or Rescue Dogs Scared Of People](#)

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

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

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

[YouTube Playlist: Puppy Essentials with Susan Garrett Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 127: Puppy Socialization: Playtime For Puppies And Permissions](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 79: Reduce Anxiety and Grow Your Dog's Confidence with These Pro Dog Training Tips](#)

[Podcast Episode 45: My Dog Just Got Jumped. Now What?](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 81: Sudden Aggression and Your Dog's Thyroid](#)

[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](#)

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

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

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

[Podcast Episode 62: 12 Keys to Helping My Dogs Live a Long and Happy Life](#)

[Podcast Episode 67: Are You Stressing About Your Dog's Stress?](#)

[Podcast Episode 103: Excited Or Suspicious Dog? Dealing With Your Dog's Emotions](#)

[Podcast Episode 168: Creating Confidence For Anxious, Stressed Or Reactive Dogs Part 1](#)

[Podcast Episode 169: Dog Training A Stressed, Anxious Or Reactive Dog Part 2](#)

[Podcast Episode 112: Stressed Dog? How Trigger Stacking Might Be Putting Your Dog Over Threshold](#)



# Understanding Dog Fear (Part 1): Genetics, Trauma, And Your Dog's Well-being

### 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

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