Speaker Key

SG   Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Ahh, puppy socialization. For every puppy owner that does this right, I bet you there's a thousand puppy owners that either don't do it at all or do it terribly, terribly wrong. And today I'm going to share with you the exact things that I do to socialize my own puppies and ways that you can go about doing exactly the same thing with your puppy.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. So, why do we socialize puppies anyway? Well, socializing typically people think of it as a time period between eight and 12 weeks where we want to expose our puppies to other dogs and people so they grow up to not be afraid of seeing puppies or dogs or kids or all of those novel things that will help our dog live a full life.

But somewhere along the way, puppy socializing became a free for all where the longer a puppy is allowed to play flat out and fall over tired with a puppy or another dog or a group of puppies or another dog, then we've done a great job of puppy socializing.

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And I beg to differ. That is not a good job of puppy socializing. That actually is contributing to a puppy that is out of control around other dogs as they get to be an adult dog. Likewise, when people believe that their puppy needs to be held or needs to meet every single person that they see, "You see a person in the horizon? Okay, we got to go meet that person because we're puppy socializing."

So, that to me is taking puppy socializing and going about it the wrong way. Things like puppy daycare or dog parks, those are a recipe for disaster, potential disaster for a puppy. Now, I'm not saying that all day cares are horrific, but allowing a puppy to just have full on access to other puppies and play and play and play until they're tired is not something I would ever do with any puppy that I've ever raised.

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So, what is the goal? I asked this question on a live stream recently. Why do we train dogs at all? Like what's the goal of training? Socializing is going to get looped into my idea of training. So, the goal number one is safety. We want to keep our dogs safe. We want to not have avoidable veterinarian bills.

Not only the expense of veterinarian bills, but the trauma that our dogs will have to go through if they are in a dog fight, hit by car, have to have surgery for blockages because they ate things they shouldn't have, avoidable vet bills, keeping our dogs safe means we are working to minimize, even negate any kind of avoidable veterinarian bills.

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Now that's not to be confused with unavoidable like our annual wellness check for our pets and anything that may come up due to genetics that we couldn't have predicted. So, goals for training number one, keep our dogs safe.

Number two, grow connection. Now that connection is with me or with, the things I want my dog to love. Let's say you're somebody who loves to go boating. So, you want to grow the connection your dog has for sitting in a canoe or sitting on a powerboat.

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And the third thing, and definitely not the least important is I want to always be growing my puppy's confidence in different environments, in different situations, in different training situations around different distractions. So, it's safety, connection, and confidence.

That's the reason that I train my puppies. That's the reason that I train my dogs so that my dogs can live the fullest life possible and that they will fit into my life the way I think a dog should for me. Now the vision I have for a dog for me doesn't have to be your vision. However, socializing a puppy should be part of both of our visions.

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So, I've said if I come across somebody that has a puppy and they go, "Hey, can we let our puppies play?" There's a chance I might let that happen, but there's a very good chance that I won't. So, what then does puppy socializing look like to me? Well, my goal is to have a confident, responsive, meaning that when I ask them to do something, they will do it.

Yes, my puppy now is five months old, and I would say he's responsive in some scenarios 100 percent of the time. And in, I would say just about any scenario, I have the confidence that he will respond positively to me probably 90 percent or more of the time.

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I can't think of a distraction right now where he would just not come when I called him. So, my goal is to have a confident, responsive, and emotionally well-adjusted puppy. That is the goal. And that is why, yes, indeed I do value socialization in a puppy. But what does that look like to me?

It's really three parts. So, the first is the distractions in that puppy's life. That my goal is to minimize all distractions, any environmental distractions, so that they all become white noise to the puppy. The same way that, you know, early on in our life together, Prophet and I were walking to the house and there was all these leaves blowing across the field.

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Wow. That was so stimulating to him. It was novel. And he went off and had a fun time chasing them, which I let him, but I called him, and he came back. Alright. So, those rehearsals are things that I want to see as that puppy grows up. I would like to neutralize the distractions in his life so that everything no matter if it's a bunny or livestock or other dogs or children or skateboarders or cars, they're all white noise, like leaves that are just blowing across the field.

"Oh, that might be interesting, but it's just not important to me." So, minimizing, turning distractions into white noise, that's one group of training that's important to me. Growing connection with the things that are important, either the people that my puppy has to listen to, of course myself, or any activities that I would like that puppy to do going forward.

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And the final area is growing positive CERs. Now, if you're a regular listener to the Shaped by Dog podcast, you would have heard me talk about positive CERs in context with husbandries that we want our dogs to love having their nails trimmed or any kind of husbandry procedure, looking in their ears or having a veterinary exam. These are super important. So, we need to be intentional about them. Likewise, we need to be intentional about creating positive CERs for everything that's important to us or that we could see being important in our puppy's life.

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Because if you don't set out and make these CERs intentionally positive for the puppy, you run the risk of many of them being randomly negative, meaning that the dog is afraid in situations where a hairbrush comes out. Or the dog is afraid or shuts down or gets worried when you ask them to go into their crate or you put on their harness or head halter.

So, we want to intentionally build CERs for those things. And that's where I group my puppy socialization. I want to build positive CERs to things like children and puppies and dogs. But I also want to turn children, puppies, and dogs into environmental white noise so that the puppy can easily function around them. That the puppy can easily be responsive to me in those environments.

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So, three critical areas, and I'm going to share with you how I work that socializing element with my puppies while I'm very aware of growing the connections, minimizing the environmental value of the distractions, and intentionally creating positive CERs for my dog. So, for the distractions, it's important that we minimize those.

Number one because some distractions may be things that the dog is afraid of. Now that goes hand in hand with creating positive CERs. We don't want our dog to be afraid of. For example, my young puppy Prophet who had a terrible fear of vacuum cleaners.

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And so, I'm very intentional about when the cleaning ladies come that I make sure that he isn't out when they're being vacuumed. Or if he is, he's playing a game with me. So, distractions can be things that the dog or the puppy is afraid of.

Distractions could be things that the puppy is attracted to, meaning another puppy running, another dog running, a bunny running across the grass, leaves blowing across the grass. They're distractions they're attracted to, or they could be distractions they're curious about. "Hey, I'm not sure what that is." So, we need to help them because curiosities can go into fears or attractions.

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So, we want to help that dog. And this is where growing your positive CERs and growing your connection in the face of those distractions are what helps turn those distractions into white noise for our puppies. Alright.

This may sound really complex and crazy complicated to you, let me just walk you through a scenario of what that might look like.

As you know, I train with games. All of my students, those in my online community, everything from Home School the Dog, to Recallers, to our Handling360, to Agility Nation, every single thing is taught in the form of a game. And so, those are the things that help grow my connection. Those are the things that help minimize the dog's attraction or curiosity about distractions.

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Those are the things that also help build positive CERs. And while we're playing those games, we actually are building positive CERs for some of the things that we intentionally want to create. I'm going to just share three groups of games.

I may need games that are calming for my dogs. Like if I'm in a crowded environment with my puppy where I don't necessarily want to whip out a tug toy and start screaming around like a crazy person, getting my puppy to chase me because maybe there's other dogs around.

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I might want my puppy to learn to ignore the other dogs, or my puppy might be a little afraid of other dogs. So, me acting crazy with a toy is going to attract those dogs. So, in those environments, I might want calming games.

So, calming games may be things like ItsYerChoice. If you've never played ItsYerChoice, I'm going to leave a link in the show notes.

Be sure that you jump in there, a hundred percent free. I'll give you access to our ItsYerChoice summit. Crate Games. Crate Games is a foundational game that every one of our students in our programs play. And ideally, it's something that you play routinely throughout the day because there's so many positive CERs that are built in.

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There's so many ways that you can minimize distractions through Crate Games. It is a model for so many things in what I do with my puppy. I can't encourage you enough to make sure that you are playing Crate Games with your dogs. And Crate Games morphs into a game that we call the Hot Zone, and that is a dog seeing value for getting in a dog bed that has a boundary.

Either they're raised and that makes a boundary or there's walls, little, tiny walls, like rolls on that dog bed. "Well, my dog will go on a dog bed, Susan." No, no, no, no. It's a game. Games have criteria. You go in when I give you a cue. For my dogs it's "hop it up". You can sit down or stand in there. Often, I don't care.

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And then you release when I ask you to release. It's a game. We play a lot of games within the game. So, I might play tug within that bed. So, calming games could be Crate Games. Crate Games could also be an exciting game, but it could also just be a little calming game. You can do it quietly. And the same with Hot Zone, getting my dog to adopt the pedicure please position, the flop on his side.

That's a calming game as he's putting their head down on the floor or doing a chin rest on my hand. Also, getting the nose freeze to my hand. These are calming games that I can play that nobody even knows that I'm playing with my dog.

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So, I might decide I want my dog to see rollerbladers, bicycles, other dogs, but I want them to see them from a distance. So, I might bring my raised dog bed, my hot zone, or maybe even a soft sided crate to the park, sit on a bench, get out a book, have my dog on a leash and then I can play some of these calming games in between, maybe just having my dog fall asleep in the presence of those things that potentially left unchecked.

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If I wasn't intentional about what I was doing would turn into a free for all for my dog. I see puppy, I must play. These end up being the puppies that our students say, "I think I got to return this puppy to the breeder because he just won't settle. He's crazy all the time." Because he's so overstimulated all day long playing with other dogs, playing with puppies.

And you think, "Oh, this is a great way to wear my puppy out." And in fact, your puppy is learning things that you don't want them to learn. So, we've got our calming games.

We've got our games of engagement. Now these are a little bit more, high energy games. And so, you're going to be really particular about where you play them.

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Things like coming into Reinforcement Zone on my right side or my left. I have two different cues for that side or close. Coming between my legs. Maybe I might get my puppy to walk between my legs a few steps. I might even get my puppy to back up either between my legs or in front of me. Verbal discriminations.

This is a game that is an engaging game, a little higher activity. So, I might say words like "cook", which means I'm giving you a cookie. So, I'll ask the dog to sit or down "I'm giving you a cookie." "Search" means I'm going to throw a cookie. And "chow" is a location specific marker that I tell my dogs when I've put food in the bowl, maybe a scoop of their raw food in the bowl, I'm getting them to do things.

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I might say "search" and they can get that cookie and then I'll say "chow", and then they can run across and get the cookies in the bowl.

So, when I'm working intentionally on creating positive CERs, I will use the highest value rewards I have. And for my puppy, that's his raw food. So, I'll take his raw food to the park.

I'll take his raw food to the vet's office. I'll take his raw food to the big box hardware store and get him to play the appropriate game for the environment that I'm in. So, calming games, engagement games. A couple other engagement games might be pivoting on the spot in Reinforcement Zone, turning, pivot.

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It could also be something that's a little higher energy than our hand freezes. That's our hand target where the dog touches their nose to my hand, or maybe I might get them to jump up and touch my hand with their nose.

Now the third game is where I'm in a highly stimulating environment. Maybe I'm back on that hill, but down below are rollerbladers and "My dog is really, really interested in those rollerbladers." So, in this case, I will put games in circuit.

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So, yes, I have high drive games like sit, tug, release. So, that now my game of tug is put into a circuit. Putting that game into a cycle with another game or words that the dog knows actually helps to get the connection back with me.

So, a retrieve, and then I might do a hand target and then a retrieve. Or retrieve and then a sit and a hand target and then a retrieve.

So, that I'm building in other games to a simple game of retrieve, because if the game isn't complex enough, it's easy for my dog to say, "I'm just going to go back to this. I'm going to pay attention to that." Restraint recalls are a high engaging game.

Sometimes you need another person to play this, or you can just wrap your leash around a tree, call the dog and run away.

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Again, you're going to have to let go of the leash for a moment in time. So, you're not going to play this if the dog isn't in a safe environment, but these are a little more stimulating and easier to get your dog away from a distraction and back onto you.

So, high drive games like tug and restraint recall or those high drive games that we put into a cycle. And so, you're going to play these games and by playing games like our Recallers games so I know if I have a friend who has a puppy safe dog, or I could even use my own dogs.

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I'll let the puppy visit, and then I will test my recall. And if the puppy doesn't come back to me, then I will ask the other dog to lie down so that I can pick my puppy up, move them maybe 10 strides away from the dog who's in a down. Now the dog is in a down, they're not exciting, then I'll call my puppy and then we'll have a celebration.

And I'll know my recall isn't strong enough to get the puppy to call away from other puppies or dogs. Now, does that mean that my puppy never plays with other puppies while they're learning the recall? No, but it just means they'll play it in a controlled environment where I can go in with a handful of really exciting treats, say my puppy's name as I reach for his collar, give him the exciting treat and pull him away from that play session. But it doesn't take my puppies long at all to be called away from playing with another puppy.

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And that's because of the intentional way I balance the calming game, the engaging games, and the high drive games. I play these every day so that training has a positive conditioned emotional response. So that the puppy looks forward to training with me because training is just games. And so, we keep growing these CERs every day so that it actually grows the connection.

And by growing the connection, we are also minimizing the environmental distraction. And before long, you will have a puppy that can easily be around other dogs, other people, visit with them or not. You've got to get the idea out of your head that your dog must have other dog friends. It's just not the case.

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Sure, there's some breeds of dogs like Beagles who love other dogs, but those dogs have been bred to work in a pack.

Most dogs as adults really don't care about other dogs. My Border Collies for example, they're fine around other dogs. They don't mind other dogs. They might sniff other dogs, but they have zero desire to hang out with another dog.

They don't need doggy friends. And chances are your dog doesn't either.

So, don't think your dog is weird because they don't want to hang out with another dog. And likewise, don't think that we're socializing our puppies so that they'll have doggy friends. They don't need to have doggy friends.

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They need to be a connected, confident, emotionally well-adjusted dog. And then they get to lead their best life while they join you leading your best life.

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I hope this all makes sense to you. You know, if you didn't listen to podcast number 160, where I talked about the 10 biggest mistakes people make when raising a puppy, be sure to jump over to that.

And if you are unsure how to create a conditioned CER to say something like a head halter, listen to podcast episode number 40, where I go into details on that exact topic. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Online Learning

Get Crate Games Online

Learn To Play ItsYerChoice

Resources:

Podcast Episode 218: Puppy Development Stages And Your Dog's Behavior

Podcast Episode 127: Puppy Socialization: Playtime For Puppies And Permissions

Live Stream Replay: Dog Training Foundations for LIFE or for SPORT

Podcast Episode 186: 2 Types Of Connection With Dogs: Dog Agility And Daily Life Case Studies

Podcast Episode 172: How To Teach Your Dog Anything With My Training Plan

Podcast Episode 243: Training My New Puppy, What He Knows So Far: Susan Garrett's Plan And Puppy Schedule

Podcast Episode 197: Outsmarting Distractions: How To Use Environmental Reinforcement in Dog Training

Podcast Episode 176: Why Your Dog's Emotions Are A Critical Element Of Dog Training

Podcast Episode 107: Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!

Podcast Episode 132: All The Things Your Dog Hates And How To Fix Them

Podcast Episode 171: Dog Training With Layered Shaping: Why Classical Conditioning Must Come First

Podcast Episode 24: Help for Dogs who Chase Chipmunks, Bicycles, and Neighbor's Cats (Distraction Intensity Index)

YouTube Playlist: Fearful Dogs Help with Susan Garrett

DogsThat Website (Home School the Dog, Recallers, Handling360, Agility Nation)

Podcast Episode 182: The Game Within The Game: How To Multiply Your Dog's Reinforcements

Podcast Episode 138: Frantic Dog? Are You Training Both The Hold And The Do?

YouTube Video: Understanding Your Dog's Reinforcement Zone (RZ) with Susan Garrett

Podcast Episode 151: How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!

Podcast Episode 160: 10 Common Puppy Mistakes: What To Do Instead!

Podcast Episode 40: Episode 40: Using A Head Halter On A Dog, Why My Approach Is So Different

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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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