

# Is My Puppy's Behavior Normal Or Is It Time For Me To Be Concerned?

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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Biting, lunging, fearing, growling, fleeing, drooling, peeing, pooping, screaming, digging, chewing, ignoring, climbing, chasing, burying, or terrorizing. Just some of the behaviors that your puppy may be doing now or may be doing in the future.

The question is, which one of these are normal? In an effort to make sure that the puppy that you have in your home right now or the puppy you're about to put in your home next grows old and enjoys a long-fulfilled life in your home, I decided it's time to redo an episode [normalizing puppy behavior](#).

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And you know, there's a wide range of what is normal for a puppy's behavior. And a lot of it has to do with like [the breed of dog](#). For example, if I was in need of a service dog, it would be highly unlikely my first choice would be a Border Collie.

Now, I love my Border Collies and I never would want to live a time in my life without a Border Collie in it. However, I would not call them as a breed, the most stable breed on the planet. Therefore, there are a lot of behavioral challenges that you're going to have to face if you choose to bring a Border Collie into your life.

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Now, those are normal behaviors for a Border Collie puppy, but they wouldn't be normal behaviors say for most Labrador Retrievers or Golden Retrievers, or possibly even a Standard Poodle. So, there would be better choices for me to choose for a service dog.

So, there is the breed of dog that will make a difference in the litany of behaviors that you may have to experience as a pet owner. There's male versus female in the types of behaviors that you may be experiencing. And there also is just individual quirks about the puppy you have.

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They may be a hundred percent different than any other puppy of the same breed you've had before. They might even be completely different from other litter mates that were born in the same litter. But often it could be upbringing or how those puppies interpreted experiences while they were being raised in the litter of puppies.

So, all of this is to say, what is normal anyway? And what's so bad about being a little bit abnormal? Now, what I'm sure you are aware of as a puppy owner is that there's generally two [fear periods](#) that all puppies will go through. Now, some puppies will just breathe through these fear periods, and you won't notice a thing.

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I can't remember a time with my Jack Russell Terrier puppies that I really noticed behavior changes during those fear periods. The first one being as soon after the puppy comes home from the breeder ideally that is older than nine weeks old, but the fear period may go from eight weeks to 11 or 12 weeks old as they adjust to life without their littermates, life without their mother, and life in your new home.



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A small fear period, you might just find that the puppy is a little more reserved, a little less outgoing, a little less bold, a little less confident. Now, the next fear period you may experience, but you may not, is the one that happens between six months and maybe 18 months of age.

Now that fear period coincides with that [puppy's development](#) of their hormones. And so, you will see changes in behavior. You will see things that the dog will suddenly alarm bark at like, "What was that?!" And it could be like a statue in your backyard that they've seen every day of their life. It's okay, that is normal puppy behavior.

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So is a puppy that suddenly develops a fear of men. As my now seven-month-old puppy Prophet did when he turned six months old. He went so far as air snapping. Now you might see a puppy that gets whale eyed and stiff and lunges, and maybe mouth bops or air snaps as Prophet did at what they're afraid of.

It could be children, it could be men, it could be women. Now that is normal behavior for many herding breeds. It [doesn't mean that the puppy is flawed](#). That doesn't mean that there's a defect. We cannot expect puppies to grow up being perfect little beings. We have to expect that we have to put some work in.

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Now, why did Prophet have a fear of men? It's a reflection of my sad social life, but also, I live in the country. And so, I clearly wasn't taking Prophet off the property and into environments where he would [meet a lot of new people](#) on a regular basis.

Yes, I did it when he first came home very regularly, but who's to say when enough is enough? Now I'm going to give you a list of some of the behavioral quirks that I've experienced with my most recent puppies.

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So, with Prophet, as I said, he was afraid of men. I would say his fear of men might've been a nine or a 10 out of 10, maybe not quite a 10. He did occasionally pee when a man would go to pet him. And he definitely lunged, and air snapped. Today I would call that maybe a one. He seeks out men.

In less than a month, he now is like, "Oh yeah, I love those men." There's still an occasion where if he is here at my home and Tater Salad is barking and Belief starts barking that he will go, "Oh, high alert. There must be a danger."

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If he meets men away from the home or away from those two dogs, if those two dogs aren't barking, then he rarely even bats an eye at anybody that comes in the house. So, very quickly that went from a nine or a 10 out of 10 to I would say at most it's a two out of 10.

So, fear of men, I mentioned that I had [house training challenges](#) with him. Happy to report all of that is past. He now is will happily come and tell me when he needs to go outside or anybody.

And yes, he has barked at inanimate objects in the yard that he has seen before, but that pretty much is beyond us. The latest one just came up this weekend at an agility trial where there was so much chaos and so much excitement and so much frenzy in the air.



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And when I took him on the first day, when I wasn't running, I was done for the day, I brought him back to be in that environment. We got a lot of good work in. But he was overwhelmed by all the dogs. So, if a dog looked at him, he did the same kind of behavior he was exhibiting with men. That's great.

I worked through that on the periphery, and I chose not to bring him back the next day. And I'm going to share with you at the end of this podcast what I did and what I recommend you do when your puppy shows any of these quirks, normal puppy behaviors as they grow up.

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Now, if you've listened to [podcast episode number 203](#) and 204, you know all about the [dietary challenges](#) that I faced with my next youngest dog, This!y. Now, This! had horrible car sickness. She had [separation anxiety](#). She had [resource guarding](#). A lot of her [fear and anxieties](#) were a combination of A, her GI problems and B, she was [born August 2020](#).

Now, I know that rings a bell because everybody in this world lived through the pain of the isolation of COVID, as did my puppy. And so, it was more difficult to be as vigilant in getting her out and overcoming some of her fears, but I did. I'm going to share with you again at the end what's the approach that I took.

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This!y also was very motion sensitive, had an incredible need to [chase everything](#). Therefore, that created a difficulty in really creating value for walking with me or being with me or recalling back to me. Again, quirks in the behavior that we just overcame with good old fashioned dog training.

Now This!'s mother Momentum, I really didn't have a ton of challenges to overcome other than she was very confident and loved living life at an arms distance away from me. And occasionally her inconsistent tug was something that we really had to work through, but no big problems.

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Swagger, my next oldest dog, was a singleton, meaning he had no littermates, he had no need to share anything, and there was a whole bevy of challenges that comes along with raising a singleton. But here's the newsflash, everybody. These quirks, as I described them, these behavioral glitches are not who that puppy is.

They only stay with the puppy if you start [labeling the puppy](#) and decide you got a defective one and that's your life sentence. All of the problems that I've listed, I have overcome. Yes, we're still working through the odd one with Prophet.

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And maybe there'll be more that pops up. I'm okay with it because I don't panic. I don't say, "I got a defective puppy." I look at these behaviors as my puppy saying, "Hey mom, you missed a thing. We've got work we have to do. You missed a thing, mom."

That's all the puppy is trying to communicate with us that we need more. So, let's say you do have a puppy that gets their hackles up, that shows extreme fear. And from that fear, you will see possibly growling, bearing of teeth, snapping, screaming, lunging forward.

Those are not a sign that your puppy is aggressive. 99.9 percent of the time, it's a puppy showing extreme fear and feeling the need to protect themselves.



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I'll tell you when I was at the trial, and I saw that Pheti was not happy with the dogs that would come by and stare at him. All that I did was I gave him the cue to go between my legs. I backed against the wall, and I gave him cookies. He was completely comfortable. A hundred percent different.

I'm not saying that that's what fixed him, that made him comfortable, more confident in that environment. I got him away from where the dogs were mostly traveling. I got him in a place of comfort. He was 100 percent fine until a dog came by, turned and lunged at him. Then all bets were off.

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Now he's never had a bad experience with another dog. It's just an expression of the fact I haven't got him out to as many places as he needed. Have I got him out to dozens of different locations and different environmental setups? Of course I have. But Prophet is saying, at this point in my upbringing, we are not 100 percent confident. And I'm okay with that.

So, what happens now? First of all, I'm going to give you a list of things not to do. Super important you know this. Don't scold, don't shove, don't shame, don't shelter. So, don't scold. That's a gut reaction. Our puppy is doing something we didn't expect. Unexpected needs to be, "Hey, that's wrong!"

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You've got to allow that [lizard brain](#) of yours to not overreact because, scolding the puppy could take the confidence they have in you to protect them away what little confidence is there, and they may feel the need to get even bigger and more puffy and more outlandish to try and scare away that which is they're afraid of.

So, number one, do not scold. [Don't shove](#). Don't say to that puppy, "Oh, you're afraid of that kid? Come on, you can do it. Move, get in there. They're nothing to be afraid of." Can you think of a time when you've ever been afraid of anything? Somebody telling you "There's nothing to be afraid of." is not going to make it better, right?

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Then what if they started pushing you towards that what you're afraid of, even luring you with something you love and you go, "No, no, no, my puppy's going towards that thing with the cookie." Yes, but you haven't taken away their fear. The [value they have for the cookie](#) is at this time masking a little bit of the fear, but that is not a good protocol to overcome that fear.

So, no scolding, no shoving, no shaming. No thinking worse of the puppy. No thinking your puppy is defective. You have got to hang on to the reasons why you got that puppy in the first place. You've got to hang on to how much you love that puppy. Don't let any kind of disappointment or shame or guilt come into your relationship with your puppy.

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Think positive thoughts because we can overcome what you're seeing right now. And finally, don't shelter. Some people go the opposite direction. "Oh, my dog's afraid of kids and cars. Well, I'm never going to let them be near children ever for the rest of their life. And they're never going to see another car."

The problem is, is that creates so much management in your life. And that cuts down on how much that dog can enjoy life.



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When you're afraid of something, you can't fully be a part of all that life has to offer you. So, sheltering the puppy might seem like a good idea. But it really doesn't help that puppy grow and develop as they get older. They just keep those fears.

And guess what happens? Fears don't go away on their own. Most of the time they actually start multiplying. The intensity of what they're afraid of gets bigger and bigger. Alright so, don't scold, don't shove, don't shame, don't shelter. And don't let anybody do that to you either.

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Don't let anybody let you feel bad because you chose not to discipline your puppy when they lunged at another dog. Don't let somebody say, "Hey, you've got to—." You know, I had a friend visiting me just over the weekend and she brought a male friend with her. And I explained, "Listen, my puppy may not warm up to you right away." Especially because Tater Salad was barking at the time.

So, I said, "Let's just ignore him." And he was in an ex-pen at the time. And so, this male friend said, "Well, why don't you just get a water bottle and squirt him?" So, this fellow has had experience. He's raised his own dogs. That was his solution. So, don't let anybody tell you what's best for your dog. You got to believe that this is a point of connection for you and your dog.

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Don't take that away by allowing somebody else to tell you what's best for your dog. So, we know what we don't want to do. What can we do? You're going to be curious. You're going to be compassionate. You're going to be confident, and you're going to be concerned. So, curious. Any quirk in your puppy's behavior is not something you're going to be disappointed in, and it's not going to be something that you ignore.

It's going to be something that you're going to go, "Hey, did I just see you be a little bit worried? Did I see your ears go back?" Go back to [podcast episode number 4](#), where I talked about TEMP. [Your dog's body language](#) will tell you volumes before you ever get to the point where the dog nips at somebody.

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So, be curious about anything you see and take it as feedback as "We got to grow more confidence, don't we?" So, you're going to be curious. You're going to be concerned. You're going to be compassionate. The next step of what you do is going to be, 'How can I protect or grow my puppy's confidence?'

Well, if they're in the moment of, "Oh my gosh, I'm feeling worried.", you can't grow their confidence, but we're going to protect what's there. That's why what I did at the trial is I got away from where I was, got up against a wall and I had my puppy line up between my legs.

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So now can we be confident, and can we help that puppy to know "I've got your back. There's no reason for you to be lunging at anybody." Can you do that? Can you get your puppy away from that situation?

Maybe turn and get them to chase a toy and get to a place where you see the puppy's posture be a lot more relaxed. So, have compassion for the situation, both for your dog and for yourself. Be confident. And we've mentioned this so many times that your energy runs down the leash.



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So, if you're like, "Oh my gosh, what's happening? I don't know what is happening." Just think, "Hey, Susan Garrett said there'll be moments like this. I gotcha. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to go to the confidence building protocol right now. I gotcha puppy." And be concerned because if you're not concerned, you're likely going to do nothing. And by doing nothing, you're leaving it up to the roll of a dice.

If your puppy is going to grow up and be a confident, well-adjusted, and happy dog. So, we want a level of concern so that you will take action. What does taking action look like? I've mentioned these games before, but I love these games because it's going to help grow our dog's confidence. The first thing you're going to do is get really, really good at the games at home.

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I'm going to say that one more time. We are not going to take a dog who's showing a little bit of anxiety or stress or fearfulness or reactivity and try to teach them something in that moment. They are in their little lizard brain. They cannot think clearly. All they can do is respond. And so, we can't try to teach them anything.

You may have already experienced this. Your puppy is barking at some imaginary thing that you can't even see, and you're trying to get them to sit. "Come here, come—." And they're like, "No! Woo!" That's normal puppy behavior. They can't think when they're in that state. So, we want to grow that confidence at home.

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And the first thing we're going to do, we've got to get to those [location specific markers](#). Grow the dog's understanding that when I say "cook", they just head whip around. They know 'I'm about to get a reinforcement.' Now, what are you saying "cook" for? Because what the dog is doing when you say the word 'cook' is going to get reinforced.

So, if they're [jumping on the counter](#) and you want to get them off the counter and you know by saying "cook", you'll get their attention, you've just reinforced them jumping on the counter. So, really not a good move. Build the understanding when the dog is doing neutral, they're doing something that is neither good nor bad, or they're doing something that you love.

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'Cook' followed by super high value reinforcement. The word 'search', the same way we want them to understand 'Now we're going to tell you to look for a cookie on the floor.' Those two location specific reinforcement markers are brilliant for you.

A third one is 'tug'. Now I get that [not all dogs will tug](#). And in an environment where they're stressed, they may or may not do it, but it's a great way to evaluate how stressed that dog is if they will tug. So, another great location specific reinforcement marker, 'tug.'

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Work on those three, again at home, in a neutral environment. Number four, we want to teach the puppy ['bring me'](#), a retrieve. Because again, it's something that you can do in the periphery.

If you go back to [podcast episode number 258](#), I talked about doing things in a pet store. And one of the things I did in the pet store, when I noticed my dog was afraid of men was just getting him to retrieve toys to me. There were no men around. It was just a new environment.



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I wanted to build confidence in that puppy. So, Bring Me is a great way to test how confident or worried your puppy is. [ItsYerChoice](#), another fun game of choice that's super easy to play. And again, you can find all of [these games over on YouTube](#).

There'll be links in the show notes, but ItsYerChoice is something that engages your dog's brain and gives them the power to make choices in any environment. And finally, this one I suggest you do ahead of time. And that is exactly what I talked about in [podcast episode number 40](#). And it is conditioning your puppy to love their Head Halter.

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You know, I've been doing this all along with Prophet. Conditioning love for a head halter, but I have never put a head halter on him. And just last week I was away in Costa Rica. One of my friends was looking after Prophet, and I told her, "Listen, I want you to be very cautious of him around men. We're working through."

And I gave her the protocol what we're doing. And for her peace of mind, she decided to put him on a head halter. She said, "Like he's been wearing one his whole life. He didn't care at all about it." Because we played so many games. Start creating confidence with a head halter before you need that head halter.

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So, you've got all of these games that you play at home and you're grading your dog's confidence and willingness in all different rooms. Your kitchen, your dining room, your living room, your bathroom, the backyard, the front yard. And then you want to grow even more environments.

The neighbor's yard or the neighbor's house. Again, if your dog is afraid of men and your neighbors has got like five grown men that live with him, not really a good place to go. We want to build more confidence in new environments that are neutral environments.

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So, things like a retail store, a lot of retail stores will let you [bring puppies in for training](#). You of course, ask ahead, check ahead, make sure that that's going to be okay. A park provided that your puppy's anxiety isn't about other dogs.

There are all kinds of places if you put your mind to it as long as you can control your puppy's exposure to the triggers. Now, what if in the midst of all this, a known trigger happens upon the puppy. [Go to your five Cs](#). You're going to be curious about your puppy's behavior, take it all in.

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But as you're taking it all in, you're going to play one of the games I've told you about that allows you to exit out of that environment, maintain the level of confidence the dog has all the time that you are being compassionate about what's going on. And by exiting that environment, maintain the concern you have for your puppy.

So, there you have it. So, normalizing behaviors that you may feel as a puppy owner are the end of the world. Now, I'm going to give you one last thing. If your puppy does react in a way that is a little extreme, the way that Prophet did when he entered his second fear period around six months of age where his eyes got bright, and he lunged, and air snapped at the gentleman.



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If your puppy acts any way like that, and when you get them out of the environment, they still won't take food and they're still super upset, you may want to consider the help of a Veterinarian Behaviorist. Somebody that can help you work through this extreme problem that you're seeing.

But for the rest of you, just know growing confidence in known environments and then adding more and more environments to that confidence, the more games you can play with your puppy that have cues, you're building triggers that are positive that you can use in all these environments.

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And before you know it, your puppy is going to move through that second fear period and be a far better, happier, better adjusted puppy because you were curious, and you took action to make sure that happened. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

### Training Program "Bring Me!"

[Get The Mini Course for a Fabulous Fetch!](#)

### Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice:

[ItsYerChoice Summit](#)

### Resources:

[YouTube Video: Normalize Imperfection in Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 232: Canine Predatory Motor Sequence: Understand Your Dog's Prey Drive To Enrich Your Life Together](#)

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

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

[YouTube Video: Puppy Blues: Coping With Overwhelm, Anxiety And Regret About Puppies](#)

[Podcast Episode 246: Susan Garrett's Puppy Socialization Strategies For Raising Confident, Happy Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 254: Why Your Older Puppy Or Dog Is Not House Trained And What To Do About It](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 66: Resource Guarding: Dog vs Dog Aggression](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Fearful Dogs Help with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 36: Puppy Selection: How I Do It and Why I Didn't This! Time](#)

[Podcast Episode 24: Distraction Intensity Index: Help For Dogs Who Chase Chipmunks, Bicycles, And Neighbor's Cats](#)







## Episode: #260

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

[Podcast Episode 7: You, Your Dog, Maslow and Lizard Brain](#)

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

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

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

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

[Podcast Episode 151: How Location Specific Reinforcement Markers Will Improve Your Dog Training!](#)

[Podcast Episode 33: How Do I Stop My Dog Counter Surfing?!](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 258: Training Plan For Hyper Excited Dogs: Play The Threshold Game For Calm Focus](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 40: Using A Head Halter On A Dog, Why My Approach Is So Different](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 21: The 5 Critical Dog Training Layers for Confidence with Anything](#)



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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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