

Training Plan For Hyper Excited Dogs: Play The Threshold Game For Calm Focus

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Imagine you're a dog owner who has decided, "Yes, I want to become a reinforcement-based dog owner." Meaning that you are going to look for all the solutions that reinforcement can give you rather than looking at punishment or verbal intimidation to get your dog to behave. But then somebody will make this great argument to you.

"What if your dog is chasing a bunny?" Or what if you have Fenton who wants to chase all of those deer in Hyde Park. Your piece of cheese isn't going to work then, is it? And that's why [reinforcement-based dog training doesn't work](#). Now you're going to think "They've made a really good argument. That is fundamentally sound logic."

But I'm here to say it's flawed logic. And today I'm going to share exactly what you can do when you're looking to troubleshoot your dog training when you're living in a world where punishment isn't an option.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And you know, the example I gave off the top, my dog is doing something outrageously naughty, chasing livestock, or you know, knocking over my grandmother. And I'm offering cheese to try and get him to come to me rather than to knock over the grandmother but the dog's always choosing to knock over the grandmother.

The big assumption that is wrong in that thinking is that dog training is transactional. Good reinforcement dog training is not transactional. So, I'll give you an example. You call somebody up and you say, "Hey, will you move my piano?" And they say, "Yeah, I'll move it for a hundred dollars." And they show up and you say, "Hey, would you do it for 10?"

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"No, it's not worth it to me to do it for 10." And they'll leave. That's like saying to your dog, "Do you want to stop knocking over my grandmother and come and get this piece of cheese?" Transactional dog says, "Yeah no, more value in knocking over the grandmother."

But do you have a friend or a brother that you can phone up and say, "Hey, do you think you and a couple of your friends can come and move this piano?" I'd be willing to bet you wouldn't even have to pay the 10 dollars.

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Well, now why is that? Because life with your brother or your good friend isn't about transactions. It isn't about a balance sheet. It isn't about, "I will do it for you if you do this for me." It's about having a great relationship.

Now, how do great relationships happen? They aren't just automatic. Let's say it is your brother, but you only phone him up just to get him to do things for you, or you only phone him up when you want to borrow money or when you're in trouble.

Then yeah, that's a relationship that's going to go south pretty fast. Well, maybe not if he's your brother, but it'll still go south eventually. A true great relationship is one where each person puts in high value reinforcement of their time, their attention, their presence.



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And I don't mean the physical presence, although occasionally that doesn't hurt either. That's what grows this great relationship is knowing what the other person values most and making sure that you and your end of that bargain can give what that other person values most. Alright, so really good reinforcement-based dog training is relational. It's not transactional.

But I'm not saying all reinforcement dog training is like that because you will have people say, "Oh, your dog doesn't pay attention. Get a bigger meatball. Squeak the squeaky." That is a transactional approach. And it is flawed because you are telling your dog, 'Evaluate every moment of your day, is what I'm offering better than what you can get on your own?'

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That's not the kind of relationship that you want with your dog. And what's going to happen is that's when people say, "Yeah, you have to punish because the dog isn't going to choose you." "We have to punish them in some way that they become afraid to not do what we want." Is that the kind of relationship you want with your dog?

That's not what I want for my dog. And I believe that all problems can be solved with a sound strategy of approaching reinforcement. So, I'm going to give you an example of a case study that happened recently with a very good friend of mine.

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She has a eight month old Border Collie puppy and she presented this challenge to me. She said, "You know, he's getting worse and worse and worse. When we go places that he really likes to go, he gets almost out of control." So, imagine if you have a dog who's very excitable, very high drive. [Some may call them hyper.](#)

That when they can predict something they really like, then as they get closer to that something they might bark, they might yip, they might start spinning on their leash or pouncing off of you, maybe nipping at you. They might walk on their hind feet, [pulling against the leash](#), lunging and pulling and lunging and pulling.

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Now, I'm not saying that my friend's Border Collie puppy did all that, but that's not uncommon to see dogs who can predict something amazing is about to happen that they really, really like. And as I mentioned in Shaped by Dog [episode number 245](#), when I talked about antecedent arrangements and back in [episode number 16](#), where I talked about the thing before the thing, most of the answers to our dog training problems have a formulaic approach.

And it is ABC, antecedent, behavior, consequence. So, I find it's a lot easier for people to write all the things about the behavior first. So, in this case, the dog is definitely pulling on leash, very difficult to control, is maybe whining or barking or screaming. They might be turning around and nipping because they're frustrated.

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They might be bouncing up and down or bouncing off of you. Have a vision yourself of this unruly puppy, or unruly dog if it's been going on for quite some time. Right? All of the B, the behavior that the dog is showing at that moment. Now let's go and look at what is the consequence, meaning what happens after?



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For most of these dogs, they get closer to the thing that they really want. They can see it, they can hear it, they can smell it. And very quickly they can be in the midst of it. They can join in the activity. They can greet the person. They can run around in the environment that they're really excited about being in.

On the way there, they can pull and pull. And if you know anything about how [police dog or protection dogs are trained](#), the pull back is like recoiling a spring. You let them go and they charge ahead with so much more vigor than if they weren't pulling. It's far more exciting to the dog when you pull back and let them go versus just letting them go.

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Which is why when I've taught you about how to do a restraint recall, you hold the dog back while the owner is teasing them getting excited. That's exactly what we're doing when we are letting the dog drag us towards something that the dog really wants. The B, the behavior, gets the C, the consequence of being enveloped by all the things that is exciting the dog.

And all the while, chances are the dog's getting attention from the owner as the owner is saying, "stop it", "don't do that", "get back here", "Sparky, Sparky, Sparky, what are you doing Sparky?!" So, not only do they get closer to the things that they're attracted to, not only do they get to see the people maybe, or the other dogs, or the swimming, or whatever it is that a dog is excited by, they also get the chance to pull and the attention of the owner.

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So, we've got the B and we've got the C. Now we've got to look at the A, the antecedent to all that. Sometimes it could be a trigger that creates the call to the behavior. So, the antecedent might be just you, opening a door.

And on the other side of the door is sights, smells, sounds that the dog recognizes are really exciting things or previous history of going through that door and giving them sights, sounds, smells, activities that they love to do.

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So, in my friend's case, it was when she would come to my training center that her dog often found me in there playing with one of my dogs. But mostly there was a lot of fun activity that we did. Dog training here is all about games. So, yeah, it's an exciting place to be. And yeah, he would get excited about coming in that door.

So, the A, the antecedent was her opening the door. And then all of the behavior that she really didn't want to see started to happen. But here's how the thing before the thing works. It will start at that door or whatever that final trigger is. For some dogs, it might be the sight of a person or the sight of another dog or the sight of dogs playing.

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And then it becomes the door that leads to all of those things. But soon it will be the walk up to the door. Somewhere along the walk up to the door, they might start getting antsy, whining, pulling, jumping up and down, barking. But then it might be [getting out of the car](#).

Getting out of the car is crazy exciting because it's the thing before the thing before the thing. And before you know it, it might be [the whole drive](#) from your house to getting to my place. The thing before the thing before the thing is getting super ultra exciting.



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And it's just ABCs because the consequence is what reinforces the behavior, and the behavior is triggered by the antecedent. I hope that makes sense, right? So, we've got the scenario. What can we do to fix it?

What we're going to do is we're going to take that A, the antecedent, and we're going to have it trigger not the cascade of all those hyper exciting greeting behaviors or rituals. We're going to have that trigger a behavior that you both love.

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And I'll share with you what it looked like with my friend who we went through this on the weekend. And I'm going to share with you how it can even be better with your dog. Because what I was doing was coaching my friend in the moment. What I'm going to coach you to do is to plan for it so that you are prepared with a game that the dog recognizes.

Now I'm going to tell you that games are triggers all on their own. I'm coming back to this story, but I'm going to take a little side trip and I'm going to share with you that my seven-month-old puppy Prophet, because I haven't been as good at taking him out to [visit all kinds of people and places](#) in the last couple of months, that he has become a little bit afraid of men.

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So, I had two options, get myself on Tinder and see if I could just set up arrangements with men. That sounded like a lot of work for me. And so, option B was, I told everybody who works here, we're going to take the puppy out every single day to a new environment to create positive experiences. And today was the first one.

We went to a pet store and all I wanted him to do was to be comfortable and happy at that pet store without men. New environment, comfortable and happy with that pet store. So, the trigger of retrieve, he loves to retrieve. So, even though he was a little hyper aware, sniffing everything, not his normal [confident posture](#), he was a little bit anxious, as soon as I threw a toy and told him to bring me, boom, [changed his state](#).

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Because that trigger created a cascade of behaviors that didn't involve any kind of fear. So, I use that game of 'bring me' the toy, not every two steps. But every once in a while, that led towards a very calm puppy before we left the store.

Alright, so let's talk about the triggers that we're going to create in your dog to change the cascade of excitement and hyperactivity in the dog that wants to knock down grandma as soon as he goes through the door to visit her.

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There's a few prerequisites and I'm pretty sure almost every single one of them you can get from my [YouTube channel](#). And I recommend that you relisten to Shaped by Dog [episode number 109](#) called Project Calm, where we are working to prevent overexcited greeters. It's a different approach, but it's one that will work hand in hand with what I'm going to share with you today.

So, the prerequisites that I have for you. Number one, the cue "cook", which means 'I'm going to deliver a cookie to where you are now. You don't need to move forward.' Number two, the cue "search", which means 'Find the reinforcement I just threw on the floor.'



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Number three, value for [Reinforcement Zone](#). That is the spot on your hip. And that can begin with a very popular YouTube video I have called [Perch Work \(Pivots and Spins\)](#), and also [podcast episode number 73](#), where I talked about shaping value for the Reinforcement Zone.

Now personally I named them, my right side I called 'side', my left side I called 'close'. What's really important is when I deliver food rewards, when my dogs are in this position, I always touch my hip before the food goes to the dog's mouth.

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So, then the connection isn't from my bait bag or my pocket to my dog's mouth, it's from my hip to my dog's mouth. Alright so, those are three super easy prerequisites for you. The final two are just human mechanics that I know you'll be able to pull off. And you're going to do them both, rehearse them both with just carrying your leash without a dog attached.

You can even put a little stuffed animal on the end of it to practice with a stuffed animal. Don't practice this one with your dog until you get the mechanics nailed right by yourself. So, if you have your dog on your leash, you're walking in one direction and what we want is an inward turn, side change, and direction change.

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Now that's a very big phrase for what in agility we call a 'Front Cross'. By inward turn, your dog is on your left and you're walking straight, your dog's walking straight, you turn into your dog. Your dog is going to follow you and turn into you. Now, the dog previously was on your left side, now they're on your right side and you have changed directions.

You were previously going forward. You are now going in the opposite direction. So, it's an inward turn, side change, and direction change, AKA agility Front Cross. Really get comfortable at that with dog on right and dog on left, walking your dog on the right, turning in to change to get your dog on the left, walking dog on left, turning in to get your dog on the right.

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So, that's where working on your Reinforcement Zone is going to have a dog who's comfortable being on your right-hand side. And the final move is much easier and that is a same side direction change. So, if your dog is on the left, pretend there's a painted line on the ground. You can put duct tape on the ground if you want.

You're going to walk on a line and just turn and go back on that same line. So, your dog is on the left. They go all the way around the outside. You know, you're pivoting in the middle as you make that turn. Your dog is on the outside, they have further to go. It's a same side about turn. You're going back in the same direction.

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Those are two turns. Our dog's going forward. We need our dog's going back. But I want you to be consciously aware of the two sets of mechanics because one will help the dog reorient to you. The other has the potential of losing the dog's focus. And we will do it as a test down the road.

But the goal is when your dog is in the presence of one of these triggers, we help them reorient back to us. Now, if that sounds vaguely familiar, I did talk about this in [podcast episode number 88](#), where I'm talking about working on exterior distractions for your dog.



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So, what you're going to do is you're going to practice this around your house. You work on those five elements separately. So, what we're going to do, we're going to walk up to a door, touch the handle of the door, and do a Front Cross AKA an inward turn towards your dog.

Touch the handle, inward turn towards your dog, change side, say the word "search" and toss a cookie on the ground. You're going to do that, two or three times. Touch the handle, say search, turn, toss a cookie on the ground. Now this next time, you're going to touch the handle, then say the word "cook", and you're going to touch your hip, the side that the dog is on, obviously.

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So, if your dog is on the left, you're going to open the door with your right or touch the handle of the door with your right. If the dog is on your right, you're going to touch the handle with your left. Say the word "cook" first, touch your hip and feed the dog. You're going to do this in any threshold around your house.

You're going to just pick one, get it really good at the one, and then we're going to move to another. It's a threshold game. It's a game. It's fun. Your dog's going to love it and it's going to create a great trigger for you. So, touch the handle. The handle becomes the trigger that tells the dog to reorient to you instead of looking forward to what's on the other side of that door.

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That's where we're headed. And what we're doing is currently all the value is on the other side of the door. We are telling the dog, 'Here's the relationship with me. There's a lot of value to be had with me.' So, when I touch the door, I might be dealing out value over here. I might be dealing out value on my side.

Now when you get to the place where you can touch and turn and you can feed your dog in Reinforcement Zone, now we're going to open the door. Do the same thing. Sometimes do a front cross, say search, drop a cookie on the ground. But now you're probably at a point where mostly you're going to open the door and then do a front cross, touch your side, say cook and feed the dog in Reinforcement Zone on your side.

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Eventually, you're going to walk up to the door, open the door, maybe take two steps into the room, do that inward turning front cross on the way back, maybe three steps towards the door. You're going to give one cookie on your side, take one more step, another cookie in Reinforcement Zone on your side. So, it's a random amount of reinforcement.

Eventually, the dog's going to go, "This is a cookie fun game." "When we cross a threshold, really cool things happen to me." Just like my puppy who was excited when I threw the toy at the store. "I'm a little bit worried. I'm a little bit— Oh, Bring Me! I know that game!"

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So, the threshold game teaches the dog how to orient to you and not be concerned about what's happening out there. And once you get good, you might walk five steps into the room before you do an inward turn, a front cross, and walk part of the way out.

You could like decide one trip, you're gonna feed on your hip. Cook, feed on your hip. Take one more step, cook, feed on your hip. Every step out of the room, you're feeding on your hip.



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Remember, mix up the value of your reinforcement. Don't just use boring old kibble. Use a mixture of super exciting treats with your dog. And when you're starting this, I would recommend really high value reinforcement.

And then you get to a place where you might reinforce them once, and you might reinforce them twice. You might walk in and out of that one room, then go to another room, start the behavior again. So, it might take, we go in and out of one room, but in the second room we get reinforcement or reinforcement on the threshold game for both rooms.

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You've got a great game, my friend. Now you're going to use it to the outdoor. So, if dogs get excited going outside because they know they're going for a walk or they know they're going for a car ride, it may take more tossing the cookie back or forward turning and rewarding in Reinforcement Zone.

But if you're patient and you grow this up, I promise you, your dog is going to learn thresholds mean orient to you. And when I was doing this with my friend's puppy, literally in less than 10 minutes, that puppy was orienting back to her and not being concerned with what was going on in the environment in my building.

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Now I even went to the place where I got my puppy out and I started playing games with my puppy kind of as a tease AKA distraction and he wouldn't even look. And that's when we went to the final test. And that is instead of an inward turn, she walked in, and she turned to do a same side turn to walk out.

Why is this a test? Because on an inward turn, the dog is kind of forced to follow you because your turn gets their attention and they come with. But when you're doing a same side turn, you can lose your dog as they go off towards the distraction while you try to head out the door.

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That's a real test on how much value have you built for the threshold game. So, we only use that same side turn occasionally, but once your dog says, "I pick you.", you can use it as often as you like.

I would love for you to play the threshold game. And I would love for you to come over to YouTube and share your comments over there. Let me know what you think. I love the feedback I'm getting.

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Thank you, guys, for the amazing comments on our YouTube channel. My team and myself, our goal is to make the world a better place by helping dog owners just like you have reinforcement-based solutions so that you know, there is a better world for both of you together. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.





Episode: #258

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Resources:

[DogsThat YouTube Channel](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 215: What Your Destructive, Lunging, Nipping Or Hyper Dog Or Puppy Is Trying To Teach You](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Loose Leash Walking with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 245: Make Dog Training Easy! Quick Guide To Antecedent Arrangements](#)

[Podcast Episode 16: The Thing Before Your Dog's Thing](#)

[Podcast Episode 94: How the Best Professional Dog Trainers Use Reinforcement](#)

[Podcast Episode 164: The Danger Of Car Travel For Dogs: Evaluating Your Risk](#)

[Podcast Episode 165: Why Do Dogs Bark In Cars And How To Stop It](#)

[YouTube Playlist: How to Socialize a Puppy with Susan Garrett](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 109: Project Calm Dog: Prevent Over Enthusiastic Greetings](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 73: Why Your Dog Is Still Pulling on Leash And How To Fix It](#)

[Podcast Episode 88: Barrier Frustration: Help for Fence Fighting, Leash Reactivity and Window Guarding](#)



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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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