

## Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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In Shaped by Dog [podcast episode number 262](#), I explained all of the necessary steps to shaping a high drive dog. And the question came up, "What if my dog isn't high drive? Like, I need help too."

So, in today's episode, I'm going to help those of you who have a dog who may be the opposite end of the spectrum, not high drive, but more reserved, possibly timid, shy, maybe even fearful. That's the topic of today's episode.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And you'll often hear me say our dogs are doing the best they can with the education we've given them in the environment we've put them in. And that I'm sure can be a frustration if you have a dog that is either very high drive, or the opposite end, a little bit more timid or shy.

Because those two groups of dogs create difficulties for anybody who owns them. That those of you who have dogs in the middle, I'm not saying they're easy to train, but they'll definitely cause less frustration than the dogs owned by the people who find themselves at either end of the spectrum. And trust me, after 35 years as a professional trainer, I've seen them all.

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I've seen all kinds of dogs. I've seen training go very, very wrong for some of these dogs. And I've seen training that has worked incredibly well. And there's a lot of similarities when we're talking about dogs at either end of the extremes. But there's a lot of big, big differences. But for either one of those groups of dogs, it's important that you train the dog in front of you.

And for the dogs that we're going to talk about today, the more timid, shy, less confident dogs, it's super important because you will find you will have a different dog on any different day. You may even have a different dog in the midst of an actual training session.

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And so, you need to be able to adjust on the fly to what the dog is presenting, both the challenges and the successes. Be able to adjust and dial your training up or dial your training down where need be. And today I'm going to share with you how to do that.

Now, before I go too far ahead, there's some really valuable Shaped by Dog episodes that I encourage you to dive into. Actually, if you jump over to YouTube, there are eight different playlists. Well, there's probably more, but eight that I can point out that are going to help you. If you have a dog who's a little bit less confident, more shy, and a little bit more difficult for you to train.

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In [podcast episode number 229 and 230](#), I shared my experiences shaping my less confident dog DeCaff. Really important stuff. And in there, I talked a little bit about the transfer value. But with a dog that is less confident, the transfer of value is so darn important. With higher drive dogs that kind of happens organically. They get that transfer easier. With a dog that is showing less confidence, you have to be intentional.



# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

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And what happens generally is people actually block that transfer of value by the training decisions that they make, more on that later. But it's super important that you get a grasp on that. [Podcast episode number 236 and 237](#), I shared how to go about training fearful, anxious dogs.

And I outlined a triangle for you to think about. In the middle was the word 'confident dog'. And what we're talking about today is just growing that confident dog. Now those two episodes are super critical for you to watch where I share the triangle.

On the bottom is your dog's reinforcement. On the left-hand side of the triangle is training environments. I'll go a little deeper on that today. And on the right hand is games to play. And so, I'm going to do more of a deep dive today.

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But first, I want to talk about your role. Super important. When you have any kind of an extreme dog, your mindset is everything guys. Because there'll be days that it'll be frustrating for you. There'll be moments of time where you might, you know, give yourself a smack in the head and say, "Why do I keep doing this?"

But super important that the love you have for your dog always remains exponentially greater than any outcome goals that you may have for that dog. If you can keep that ratio where, "Yes, I'd like to improve, I'd like to grow confidence, and maybe I'd like to do like a dog sport with my dog." If you keep the care, the love you have for that dog, number one, then you're never going to make training decisions that are going to hurt your dog's progress and hurt your dog's confidence.

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Because remember with these dogs, number one thing we have to do is grow that confidence. And episode number 236, I do go into great detail to some outside factors that could be having an incredible effect on your dog's behavior. Some of the things that I discovered with my own dog This! that made training so much easier.

As I said in that episode, there are some problems you just can't dog train, but if you fix the environmental situations, dog training becomes really super easy. So, don't keep banging your head against the wall.

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So, your mindset is super important. You want to make sure that you keep your confidence as high as possible. You might not be an experienced trainer. Heck, this might be your first dog.

You have reason to create doubt in your mind that you're never going to be able to do this, you can't overcome this. But you've got to let those thoughts come into your mind as they're going to, you can't help them coming in. Thank them for hanging out and ask them to leave.

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Because your confidence has to be as high as possible in order to bring out the best in that dog. And I know you can do it. Here, I'm going to give you a little insider tip. There's something in your life that you're really, really good at. There's something in your life you are way better at than I am.

For example, you might be amazing at knitting. You might be amazing at tennis. Not a sport I'm great at. Accounting, oh, you've got me in spades, not good at accounting.



# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

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Whatever it is you're really, really good at, when you're feeling a little bit down about training your dog, I want you to think about how confident you are as a knitter, as a tennis player, as an accountant. That'll lift your shoulders and then you take that confidence, and you go in and train your dog.

It's borrowing the confidence. I don't care how you get it. The energy goes right down that leash. Your dog is going to feel so much better knowing that you're not dejected and depressed and overwhelmed by what's ahead for you when you're trying to get the messages across.

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Number two, don't let anybody's opinion of your dog ever shatter your confidence in what is possible. People might call your dog 'shut down' or 'scaredy cat' or 'big baby dog', but please don't ever let those words come out of your mouth.

And for those of you who are saying, "Oh, they're just words. I say it in a happy tone. My dog doesn't understand." I beg to differ. After 35 years training dogs professionally, I will stake my reputation on the fact, it makes a massive difference. So, even if there's only one tiny weenie, weenie little chance that I'm correct, I encourage you to not ever say anything negative about your dog.

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Don't say anything negative about yourself. That self-talk is what's going to help you get up every day and start with a new fresh attitude. So, mindset is everything when you have one of those extreme dogs. And I look at one of those extreme dogs and I've had dogs on both extremes, I look at them as gifts.

They've brought gifts into my life that I didn't have before. They brought knowledge. They brought insight. So, you are on a journey, my friend, just like I was. And you don't know where that dog is going to lead you, but I promise you it's going to be somewhere special. And it's a place you weren't at before you owned that dog.

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Okay, some of the misguided assumptions that people make about dogs that are softer, that are maybe a little bit more worried or shy. And they'll say things like, "You need to give that dog anything they want. Otherwise, they're just going to shut down." They'll say, "You should never have any rules. There's no criteria. They can never do wrong."

Now I'm not suggesting we use punishment to train those dogs, but I am saying just like all animals, rules give them understanding of how they can earn reinforcement and they need and desire the understanding of those rules of every game that you're going to play with them.

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Some people might suggest, "Oh, keep those dogs crated until they really, really want to work with you. That will help them really build that drive." No, no, it won't. What these dogs need most of all is confidence. That's not going to grow in a crate. Well, maybe it will grow in a crate, but it doesn't help their confidence outside of that crate.

Another misguided assumption is you should never praise, talk to, or touch a dog who is in a shutdown mode, who's showing any signs of fear or discomfort with their environment. Don't ever praise them because you're then reinforcing their fear. I want you to tell me, think about anything, any time in your life when you've ever been afraid.



# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

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Are you afraid of snakes? Are you afraid of thunder? Are you afraid of spiders? Are you afraid of the dark? Any time in your life, maybe you know, you've had a loved one that was lost for a moment, and you were like, "Oh, panic stricken." Now, if somebody came up and said, "It's okay. Don't be afraid. You're fine."

Does that reinforce your fear? What if they offered you some M&Ms? Is that going to reinforce your fear? Are you going to then anytime you see a spider or a snake, are you going to be more afraid than you would have before? It's a crazy idea, assumption, a crazy misguided assumption to say we are reinforcing fear.

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Fear is an emotion. We can intensify fear by adding to it, maybe yelling at somebody when they're afraid. Makes them more afraid of you. Maybe pushing them more into their fear. "You're afraid of spiders, I'm going to put spiders on top of you."

We can intensify fear, but people, we can't reinforce it. If you talk calmly or even give a dog whose afraid cookies, what you're going to do is you are going to at the very worst, do nothing. But you might actually grow a better bond with that dog. You might actually give the dog a resource to go to when they are feeling a little afraid.

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Okay, things I don't want you to do though is I don't want you to coddle that dog. So, if a dog showing a sign of fear. I'm going to talk to them. I'm going to maybe even give them cookies while I get them out of that environment because I don't want a dog to be in a triggered state.

So, I'm not going to coddle. I'm not going to pat them and tell them, "It's okay. It's okay." I'm not going to pick them up. I'm getting them out of there. Get them out of there. That's the biggest thing you want to do.

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And probably one of the most common mistakes people make when they have a shy or less confident dogs is they cheerlead. They really want their dogs to be a success and they want to help their dogs be a success.

But that's not how it works. You can't cajole and cheerlead and "atta-boy, atta-boy" because that's luring. And we know that reinforcement at the deepest level happens only when you allow a dog to make a choice.

Sure, they going to love the yummy cookies, sure they going to love you giving them a lot of praise before they do anything, but that doesn't help get that transfer of value. So, you really need to be reserve, let the dog think, let them make a choice, and then when you reinforce them turn on that joy. The joy happens after the choice.

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I would say the biggest mistake people make with dogs who are less confident is they over face them. Either [over face them in their training](#), or over face them in the environment where they're training. So, they're either over facing them with the complexity of what they're trying to get them to do, or they're trying to train them when there's other dogs around and they're a little afraid of dogs. They're training when there's people around, they're a little bit leery of people.



# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

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That they're trying to train the wrong things. "[I want my dog to do agility.](#)", but you haven't dealt with the fact that your dog is nervous about people. Or you haven't dealt with the fact that the dog doesn't like wet grass.

So, create a confident dog, then let's add some complexity to that. Because then you have a dog who goes, "That used to be complexity, but it's not complexity now. I'm good. Let's go." So, our number one goal is we're going to create confidence. And how are we going to do that? We are going to train with clarity, but not with complexity.

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And so, we're going to be shaping these dogs, but let me remind you [what shaping is](#). Shaping is when a dog chooses on their own to offer a response. Now why would a dog choose on their own to offer a response?

Number one, they feel safe. They feel confident that nothing bad's going to happen to them if they move forward and make a choice and do something. Why would they move forward and do something?

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Because they're either motivated by the antecedent arrangements that you've created in front of them. Or they're motivated by the reinforcement that they earn for doing something. So, if your dog really isn't driven by the reinforcement you're using, you need to go back to episode number 236 and address that first.

Because we can't shape a dog who doesn't want to move and who doesn't want any kind of reinforcement that you're offering them. It's just not possible to shape that dog. So, let's deal with that. Remember, we've got our triangle. Reinforcement, environments, and behaviors. So, the bottom one reinforcement, the hierarchy of reinforcement, that is the most important thing for you to deal with first up.

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So, in many of the podcast episodes, I've mentioned the [Yerkes-Dodson's Law](#), the arousal curve. Our dogs that need more confidence often live their training lives at the lower left-hand side of that curve. At the lower left-hand side of the curve is where they notice insignificant things in the environment.

They'll notice like the sound of a footstep. "Oh, who's that?" They'll notice like a leaf falling. "I don't know if I like that leaf falling." They'll notice things that are insignificant. So, our goal with those dogs is we've got to move them out of the lower left-hand side of the curve. We can't train our dogs down there.

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We have to get them into the training zone, right? When an athlete says, "I'm in the zone", we need to get your dog in the zone. Alright. And you can do that. I'm going to share with you, that's going to be a big focus of our training. But first, we have to deal with any emotions.

So, if we have true fear, that's the first thing we have to do is get our dog's emotional state to a place where they feel safe. And where are they going to feel safe? I bet it is somewhere in your home. We'll talk about that in a minute when we talk about environments.



# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

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We want to grow our dog's confidence and believe it or not, the best way we're going to do that, we want to get our dogs doing and not thinking. A lot of dogs that are lower drive, or are a little bit shy, they're overthinking everything. If we can get them doing and not thinking, then we're on the road to getting them to a more confident place. So, let's start planning the training.

Okay, the first thing we're going to plan is your training environment. Number one, where is your dog most confident? What room in your home are they most confident? What time of day are they most confident and happy?

That is where your first training session happens. Just like dogs at the other extreme of the training family, the ones that are over the top, really super hyper drive, those dogs need super short sessions. So do our dogs at this. I think all dogs really benefit from short sessions, but definitely dogs that are lacking confidence.

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So, we're going to think of training environments. You're not going to take that dog to training class if they are not at their best. Just take a pass for a couple of weeks. That's all it will take to get your dog to a better place. So where in your home? Can you set up a little training den?

You know, block off an area with a baby gate, block off an area with a end of an ex-pen so that that dog is not going to be bothered by any other dogs. Ideally your training den, it's just you and your dog. There's no other people, there's no other dogs, there's no other animals.

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Now, with most puppies that I start, I start them in a bathroom. But when I'm [training a rescue dog](#) that needs more confidence, the bathroom's too small because the number one thing we need to do with these dogs is get them moving. There's really not that many places to go in a bathroom.

So, yes, we need to create an environment of confidence. And yes, we need to minimize distractions that's arranging our antecedents so that the dog will choose what we want them to choose. But with these dogs that need more confidence, we need a little bit of room to maneuver our own bodies.

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So, find a room in your house. And you're going to train only in that room until you get some success. Then you're going to go to another room in your house, possibly your bedroom. Then you're going to go to a third room in your house where there'll be a little bit more distractions. Maybe there's more people.

Maybe it's a bigger room. That bigger room will make that dog feel a little more uncomfortable. It could be your kitchen. Then your fourth training environment. Now that one might not happen for another couple of weeks. That one will be right near a door to go outside. Can we get that same level of confidence at the door to go outside?

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If we can, we're going outside. Ideally a backyard, again, where we can control the environment so that the dog can have success. But what you're going to do is you're only going to be outside training for like seconds, 10 seconds, get back in. And I will give you the things that you can train to have success here.



# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

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And then our sixth environment, we're training outside off the property. We're only going to move up to that level of distraction when we've gotten confidence in our training den, we've moved to the bedroom, we've got confidence and excitement in the bedroom with the games I'm about to share with you. Then we go to our kitchen, and we keep growing that environment AKA introducing more challenge when our dogs are more confident.

Remember, I spoke in podcast episode 262 about the frustration theory and how high drive dogs tend to go to invigoration. Well, these lower drive dogs tend to go to immediate suppression in that if they fail and they don't feel confident and happy, they're going to give up.

Our goal is to change that response to failure. We want to move it from suppression to a little bit of persistence. So, the moment I saw my dog Decaff try and try to figure out a problem for the first time, I was just so excited. I knew we were creating persistence. Okay. So, what are we going to train?

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First off, we want to train our [location specific reinforcement markers](#), but we want to do it a little bit differently. For our dogs, the number one we're going to go to is chasing food. Yeah. Remember high drive dogs, we don't want to do this one. Our dogs that need more confidence. Yeah. Giddy up. We're going to get them chasing food.

You've got to be excited about it as well. You're going to cookie bowl, say the word 'search'. It means nothing to the dog. And then we're going to just roll cookies off your hands. You might even be on your knees when you're doing this. Roll cookie off your hand and see if the dog or puppy will chase it.

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If they do, that's a success. Then you're going to stand up, see if you can roll the cookie, say "search", get the cookie. Now you're going to take off running in the opposite direction. When that puppy or dog catches you up, you're going to say "cook", which means I'm delivering a cookie and give them a cookie.

So, now we've got two location specific reinforcement markers. I want you, when you say "search" for the next couple of days to really search, say "search", toss the cookie, run to the opposite side of the room. So that the dog eats the cookie and charges after you. We're getting movement.

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Remember our Yerkes-Dodson curve, we're getting movement, which gets our dog into a higher state of arousal, which means they're more resilient to failure. We're building some persistence immediately because they're more involved in what you're doing. So, we've got search, we've got cook. Now we're going to introduce a flirt pole.

Say the word "chase" and see if you can get your dog to chase whatever is on the end of the flirt pole. And you can buy a flirt pole for 19 dollars, but you can also just get a string and tie a little toy, light toy, see if your dog will chase it. And if they will, that's golden. We've got a game that doesn't involve food.

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And that's what we want because it's easier to get your dog's arousal state up. If your dog doesn't want to chase that toy right now, we're going to put that on the back burner. You can come back to that later. Next game is hand targets with a twist. Now with our dogs, we want more drive. This is how we're introducing hand targets.



# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

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You're going to put a cookie in your hand and you're going to back away from your dog and put the cookie and open the hand. So, the dog has to run in, grab the cookie from your hand. And then guess what, you're moving again. Turn away from the dog, cookie in the opposite hand, put it out. These have got to be really high value rewards. This can't be like, you know, run of the mill.

So, we've got our dog running from one hand to the other. Do that a few times and then put out a bare hand. The dog's going to run in expecting a cookie. You're going to say "cook" and drop a cookie in your hand. Do more of the chase my hand with a cookie in it. Say "cook", drop a cookie in your hand. And then do an empty hand. Before you know it, we have our dog hitting our nose target with enthusiasm. Not those very ginger butterfly tiny kind of touches. We want boom coming in and hitting their hand.

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If they're not doing that, do more of run away. Get the hand up so they have to jump up to touch it. An engaged, enthusiastic nose target to your hand is what we're looking for. Take it slowly, take it in stages, you will get it. And more than any other time if you go to [podcast episode number 141](#) where I talked about average or better, with dogs that we really need to improve their joy, improve the transfer of value they have for work, you want to be sure that any effort that is greater than average, you give the highest value reward.

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And remember what happens when you're really wanting to put an exclamation point on that reinforcement, once the dog makes the choice, then you turn on the charm, then you turn on the excitement, then you genuinely show them how proud you are. Quiet as they're working, we're quiet as they're making choices, when they make that choice that leads to something better than what you normally see, go crazy. High value rewards and lots of praise.

And now we can introduce [ItsYerChoice](#). I'm going to leave a link in the show notes so you can go join the ItsYerChoice Summit so you can play that with your dog. But we're not going to play that first off with these dogs because ItsYerChoice potentially involves some failure.

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We don't want that right starting first off with the dog. Building the drive, building location specific reinforcement markers, and then we can teach ItsYerChoice. And finally, [Crate Games](#). Crate games, now we have a dog who's enthusiastic and crate games is going to go so much easier.

You can also teach tricks like speak or spin, or ideally tug if they're chasing the toy on the end of the flirt pole. All of these things are getting our dog amped up. You're going to play these in your training den first. When you get confidence there, you're moving to the next location and the next location and the next location.

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If you do this strategically, I promise you, in a matter of a very short period of time, you are going to have a different training relationship with your dog. I promise you that. Now, I would love to hear from you. I would love to know if this is clear. I'd love to know if you have games of your own that have worked for your dog, that you worked to bring out more confidence in the dog. Please jump over to YouTube or to [shapedbydog.com](#) website. Leave us a comment, let me know what's worked, and I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.







## Episode: #264

# Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

### Learn How To Play ItsYerChoice:

[ItsYerChoice Summit](#)

### Get Crate Games Online:

[Crate Games Online](#)

### YouTube Playlists to Check Out:

Playlist 1- [Emotional Regulation in Dogs: Dysregulation, Coping Strategies, Co-Regulation, Self-Regulation and Habituation](#)

Playlist 2- [Mastery of Positive Reinforcement Based Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

Playlist 3- [Unmotivated or Stressed Dogs: Key Insights with Susan Garrett](#)

Playlist 4- [Susan Garrett's Dog Training Philosophy and Training Processes](#)

Playlist 5- [Fearful Dogs Help With Susan Garrett](#)

Playlist 6- [Reinforcement, Permissions and Transfer of Value in Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

Playlist 7- [The Emotional State of Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

Playlist 8- [The Heart / Mind Connection Side of Dog Training with Susan Garrett](#)

### Further Resources:

[Podcast Episode 262: Shaping Tips For High Drive, Frantic, Hyper Dogs To Stop Dog Training Frustration](#)

[Podcast Episode 229: Transforming An Overwhelmed And Anxious Dog Into A World Champion – DeCaff's Story Part 1](#)

[Podcast Episode 230: Finding Joy Amidst Frustration And Shame In Dog Training – DeCaff's Story Part 2](#)

[Podcast Episode 236: Understanding Dog Fear \(Part 1\): Genetics, Trauma, And Your Dog's Well-being](#)

[Podcast Episode 237: A Plan For Your Fearful Dog \(Part 2\): Susan Garrett's Strategic Plan For Anxious Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 110: Is Your Over-Aroused Dog Just Over-Faced In Training?](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Dog Agility Training and Dog Sports Tips with Susan Garrett](#)

[Podcast Episode 259: Use These Simple Shaping Hacks To Expedite Your Dog Training](#)

[Podcast Episode 86: How to Train Unmotivated or Overexcited Dogs](#)

[Podcast Episode 255: Rescue Dog Training: Priorities For Your First Week Together](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 141: Average Or Better Dog Training Question: What Did You Just Reward?](#)

[Extendable Flirt Pole](#)



## Shaping Tips For Timid, Shy, Softer Or Fearful Dogs To Create Enthusiastic Learners

### About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



### Meet Us Online

- Website <https://dogsthat.com>
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