

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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A frequently asked question of me here on the podcast is, "Susan, how do I walk multiple dogs?" And today we are going to discuss that very topic.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And there's one really, really important skill that you have got to have before you can walk multiple dogs. Any guess what that might be? You have to have the skill of being able to walk one dog.

That that one dog completely understands all the things they need to know to walk calmly and happily beside you no matter what the distraction. So, we're going to talk about that today. What that looks like, how you achieve that, the cues you need to have, and some of the equipment that might be helpful.

Once you get that with one dog, then you can add the second dog. And you might be saying, "Well, Susan, what do I do in the meantime? I have two dogs. I have to walk them."

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What I always do is I walk the dogs separately. So, one dog doesn't get added to the walk until they have all the skills that the other dogs, or in my case, the other four dogs have. So, if I'm going to walk one or two or three or four dogs together, they all need to have the basic understanding of the cues that I want to use.

So, let's get started. And first, let's discuss what those cues are. I have an informal cue that is 'with me.' 'With me' is I want my dog to walk in an arm's length distance of me. They can be a little bit ahead of me, a little bit behind me. They're walking informally with me.

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They can look around. They can take a sniff on the ground. They can say, "Hey mom, I got to stop and pee here." It's very informal, yet it does have the criteria of that arm's length distance. So, I need to be able to get a cookie into their mouth if that's something that I want to do.

Now, how I achieve that is I have two what I call [Reinforcement Zones](#), a place where the dog needs to be in order to get that cookie. And one on my right side or on my right hip, I use the cue 'side' for that one. My left hip, I use the cue 'close.'

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Those Reinforcement Zones, the dog has to be in those positions, not wrapping out in front of me, not bouncing backwards as I move forward. They have to be beside me with their head at my hip.

That's the Reinforcement Zone where they will receive their reinforcement. I think if you're listening to this podcast, you want to be that dog owner that teaches everything to your dog using reinforcement.

Now, teaching the dog to walk on leash through all the distractions, especially if you live in the country where there's all kinds of animals or in the city where there's all kinds of distractions, you need to be very patient with this process.



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So, I have 'with me' my informal cue which means, you're either on the left side close or on the right side within an arm's length of those positions. I also like to have other cues like 'sit' or possibly 'down.'

I use cues that just are tricks to give my dog extra reinforcement or to get them to stay in Reinforcement Zone, but maybe spin away from me. So, I'll have a spin to the right and a spin to the left. All of those things are extra.

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But we really need them to understand that 'with me.' 'side', 'close', also 'sit', super important, and 'cook'. 'Cook' means I'm about to deliver a cookie to your mouth. Now, when I walk my dogs, I'll often use a tug reinforcement depending on where I am.

So, 'strike' is another cue that means you can grab your toy. Maybe not a really practical cue if you're walking in a really busy city or where there's a lot of other dogs around and it can cause a commotion. In which case, stick with just 'cook.' a cookie will be delivered to your mouth if you are where? Yeah, in Reinforcement Zone.

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They need to be in Reinforcement Zone. So, those are the basic walking ones. I have one other cue. And honestly, I don't know that the dogs need this as much as they'll get conditioned to this cue because it's a disengagement cue. So, if there's like trees, you know your dogs love to sniff or an open area, you want to give them time just to sniff the ground because sniffing is just so good for our dogs.

Then I will back away from the dog, disengage them from Reinforcement Zone, and I will give them a cue. And you can say "sniffer time". I like to say, "pee mail", like read the pee mail, you know, around here I say, "here's your pee tree", and we just stop, and they can read the pee mail at the pee tree.

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Okay so, an informal cue that means you can sniff. You don't have to be that arm's length distance of me. You can go out to the end of the leash if you like. As I mentioned off of the top, we have to help that dog to understand what all of those things are alone. And the best way to start that is with a Paw Target.

Now, if you jump over to my YouTube channel, I've got a very comprehensive [video about targeting](#). And in there, I show you how to teach your dog a Paw Target. For that Paw Target, you could use anything from like a bunch of strips of yoga mats, like cutting up squares of yoga mat, a little bigger than the width of your dog's paw into a square.

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So, you can glue all those layers together. You can get a concrete garden stone, like a circle. You can go to like a feed store and get like a little goat feed bowl, little black feed bowl. Those are a little bit taller, but that's fine. So, anything, you know if you have a bigger dog, you're going to need a bigger feed bowl, a bigger target.

It's got to give your dog the width of their paws when they're standing plus one extra with the paw. So, they have a little bit of a forgiveness room. That is [your dog's Paw Target](#). Just as I described in that video, you're going to teach your dog to find value there. Then we're going to use that to help the dog understand where Reinforcement Zone is.



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You're going to put the target down. The dog is going to find it. You're going to move yourself into Reinforcement Zone. And this is important sequence. I've mentioned this on a podcast before. Take a cookie from your bait bag and you touch the hip closest to the dog's head.

So, you never feed the dog from the bait pouch or from wherever your other hand, you never feed directly into the dog's mouth because then you're going to encourage them to look for the path of, "Oh, where's it coming from? The other side of their body? I'm going to start squeezing, or I'm going to start circling my human so I can get closer to where the cookies really are."

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If they understand the cookies land on your hip for a half a second before they go into their mouth, they're more likely to hang out at your hip. Or what I like to say is be seen on your seam, the out seam of your pants.

So, we're going to build value for that Reinforcement Zone by just using that target around your home. It starts in a very quiet environment, maybe your bedroom, maybe your bathroom, maybe your living room, depending on how busy your household is.

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Quiet environment so that the dog, when they see that target and you place it down beside you, they want to find their way into Reinforcement Zone with their front feet on the target. Now, on your left, that's going to be called 'close.'

We need to be ambidextrous here because it's really important, especially if you're walking in the city, that the dog be able to walk on both sides. Now, if you have any dreams of playing any kind of dog sports, it's also super important that you walk your dog on both sides.

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So, exercise number one, help your dog find value for that target and have that target be beside you. So, they just want to drive into that position to get bonbons on your side, touch the hip on the right, and feed in position or touch the hip in Reinforcement Zone on the left and feed in position.

So, that's probably going to take you a week to establish value. So, you're going to say, "Well, Susan, this sounds like it's going to take a little bit of a long project. What am I going to do in the meantime?" You have two options. You can continue to walk your dogs separately as you have, put them on a harness and let them, you know, do as they want. Or you can set up enrichment at home exercise.

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Again, I've got another video in my YouTube channel on [how to exercise your dog in the house](#). And this dog training is really going to help stimulate their thought processes. Alright so, yes, maybe take them out in the front yard, do a little bit of sniffing outside, get them some fresh air.

But do a lot of the work inside right now while you're retraining Reinforcement Zone on the right and the left. Now we want to test how well the dog understands this. So, what we're going to do is you're going to put your dog in a sit. One stride length behind you.

They're going to be in a sit. The target is going to be beside you. You're going to turn around, look at them over your shoulder, take a deep breath. You might have to go back and feed them for staying in that sit.

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Because the more they build value, you've built value for being in Reinforcement Zone, the more they're just going to want to break their sit and come up into Reinforcement Zone. But we need to have both. We need to, you know, be in a position, maybe there's a distraction in the city. We need to be able to say "sit" and your dog will not move.

So, take this chance to reinforce them for sitting behind you. Then give them the release cue. I use the cue 'break.' which means you can now move forward. They're going to find that target and feed. So, for the next week, it's dog on your right, dog on your left, sitting one step behind, and they drive into Reinforcement Zone all on their own, just find that target.

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The next step, it could be week two, it could be week three. I don't know. Depends on how much time you have to work on this and depends on how many dogs you're working on it with. So, the next step is, build yourself another target, or two, or three, because what we're going to do is put the targets out in front.

Dog starting beside us. You're going to say, "with me" and walk one step to the next target where the dog finds their feet. Now we don't want the dog running ahead to that target. So, what you're going to do is you're going to say, "with me." take a step forward, feed the dog in Reinforcement Zone. So, they learn, they get cookies for moving to the target.

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They don't just get cookies from target to target. Otherwise, they're just going to go and run ahead to the next target. Feeding and doing that, moving that one step, they're learning now to move in Reinforcement Zone. You can do this on leash, but honestly, I do it off leash. I do all of my on-leash training off leash.

"Did you hear what you just said, Susan? I know, right? It's crazy." But because I'm doing it in my home, the puppy is learning to walk on leash while being off leash. And so, now we've got a dog who will move that one step. We're going to add turns. So, you're going to have one target, one step ahead, and then one target to the right.

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And you're just going to say "with me" once and give cookies on the way to the first target. And then you're going to turn your shoulders, give cookies on the way to the second target. You're going to teach that dog to [turn right and to turn left](#).

Okay so, it's just very slow moving. You can throughout the day without the foot targets, just call your dog into Reinforcement Zone and give them a cookie for getting there. Hopefully they're learning now to find Reinforcement Zone without that target.

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Now we're going to introduce another prop, the garbage can. It can be like a big barrel garbage can, it can be a small garbage can, depending on the size of your dog. And all that we're going to do now is we're going to try and move in a complete circle saying, "with me." touch the hip, give the cookie all the way around the garbage can in a circle.

Dog on the outside and dog on the inside. So, they learn to now travel in a circle outside and inside. Now we've got motion and it's we're eliminating some of the targets.



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Remember, we're saying 'with me' for movement, but to come into the right side we're still saying 'side.' to come into the left side we're still saying 'close'. Those are important cues because the next thing we're going to do is teach a transition from the left side to the right side.

And you're going to need that. Number one, to keep your dog's focus on you. And number two, if you see a dog coming towards you and your dog is on your left side, we don't want two dogs crossing in each other's face.

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So, you're just going to get your dog on the right side by doing this. Instead of the target being in front of you, now you're going to have your dog at their side, their paws on a target with another target in behind. And you're going to turn into your dog. You're going to say "with me" but turn into your dog.

So, the dog's going to go from your left side to your right side, touch your hip, feed the cookie, move them forward to the next target, touch your hip, feed your cookie. So, now you've got a transition from left side to right side. And all that you're going to do is use your new word.

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So, if the dog's walking in Reinforcement Zone on my left, I'm going to say "side." turn into the dog and they are now on my right side. Likewise, if the dog is on my right side and I'm turning into them, I say "close." I turn into them and my dog suddenly on my left.

You can now pivot in a circle, go back in the way you're going, but the dog won't be facing the dog you're coming onto. Okay so, you've now got a lot of skills to teach your dog. This may take weeks, this may take months, but it's going to be fun because you're building value for games.

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One of the most important things to add, now when you're feeding your dog, if you plan on doing this with multiple dogs, is the dog's name. So, I'll get a cookie, and I will say, "Prophet, cook." and I will feed Prophet, even though there's nobody else there. "Prophet, cook." and I will feed Prophet.

So, you want to take the name and the cookie game outside if you've got multiple dogs. Not literally outside of your home. Get two dogs on leash. You can be sitting on your couch if you want. Don't start it in Reinforcement Zone. Ask them to sit, say a dog's name, pick up a cookie. If they get out of the sit, put the cookie back in your hand.

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We need the dogs to maintain that sit. Say the name, "Prophet, cook" and feed that dog. "This!, cook" and feed the other dog. So, they learn that their name means the cookie is for them. So, when I feed one dog, the others aren't going to try and take that cookie because they know that cookie's not for them.

Play that 'This Cookie Is Yours Game' around your house. If you have many dogs, start with just two. And you can even have them like sitting in each of them in a bed. So, there's no likelihood that they want to move.

Say the dog's name, feed. Say the dog's name, feed. Say the dog's name, feed. Say the dog's name, feed. Then you can move those beds so they're almost touching. If this dog goes to get that dog's cookie, you stop the game. Say the name, cook. Maybe you have to move them further apart.



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That game is important because when you're walking two dogs down the street, you want to reinforce them individually without one dog going, "Well, I want all the cookies."

Alright so, we're playing that [loose leash walking](#) game with one dog at a time, adding the multiple cookie game, adding the individual name game, getting cookies, and then you bring them together when both dogs are brilliant at walking alone.

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I hope that makes sense. Please give it a try. But please, I'm going to remind you again, you need to be patient. Work this up in your living room, then try it in your backyard, then try it in your front yard, then maybe just walking one or two steps in front of your house.

Don't just say, "I'm going to go, we're going all in, we're going to try it on a walk." It's not fair to the dog. Dog's going to be frustrated and you're going to be frustrated too. But if you take your time, it's a magical way to walk two, three, or four dogs at once. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

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

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Target Stick Training for Dogs Part One – All About Targeting](#)

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Target Stick Training Part Two – Step by Step Plan](#)

[Podcast Episode 32: 20 Easy Ways to Exercise Your Dog at Home](#)

[YouTube Video: Susan Garrett's Perch Work Dog Tricks \(Pivots and Spins\)](#)

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



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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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