

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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Last week, I posted an 'Ask Me Anything' on social media, and I got a ton of questions from you. Actually, Wednesday's podcast episode was a response to one of those great questions. I have a multitude of other questions, and I'm going to answer as many as I can in the next 20 minutes. So, let's go.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And I've got questions about agility, about behavior, about reactivity. I'm going to jump into them all. And first of all, I just want to give a shout out to the great podcast team at DogsThat because they have put together a resource for me. So, I can actually refer you to a podcast episode or a playlist that's going to help you answer some of these questions into great detail.

But let's go. First question is under the category of general behavior. *Do dogs benefit from being in a multi-dog household or are they happy with human company?* And I guess the answer to that question is yes. Dogs are super, super adaptable and they adapt to whatever their life is.

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Now, there are some dogs that definitely do best in a home by themselves, especially some rescue dogs who don't have confidence around other dogs. So, if you're thinking, "Oh, I should get my dog a friend because they might be lonely.", it depends on how much time there is somebody in the house.

That may not be the case. Honestly, dogs bond great to humans. I think all dogs like to have a friend, but that friend doesn't have to necessarily be living with them. And as I said off the top, some dogs prefer to be the only dog in the house.

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Next question is about agility. *I'm struggling with drive to show my dog that agility is fun.* So, I did a live, and I'm going to put [a link in the show notes](#), and it was all about creating fun and success for your agility dog. And I want you before you go too deep into the dog training is, I always you know, refer to my dog This!.

I'll put a link to [her story](#) in the show notes as well. There's so many things that could be affecting your dog's drive. It could be a health issue. For This!, it was [a gut biome issue](#). So, it started with me completely revamping her meal plan. And I was feeding raw. If you're feeding kibble, I would definitely go to feeding fresh foods.

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Maybe just start by adding fresh food to the kibble, changing the kibble. Or if you can go to even a commercial blend, raw dog food would be ideal. But you can't dog train a problem that isn't a dog training problem.

So, a lot of times drive is more of a gut biome problem that can be related to nutrition. It can be related to a lack of digestive enzymes. You might need some probiotics.



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I like to refer people to my friend, [Dr. Laurie Coger](#) over at [Healthy Dog Expo](#). She's a great resource to help you dig into, is it something that you just can't see?

Next question. *I suspect my dog is having early takeoff at agility. Can I still do the sport? Is it selfish to want to continue?* I think that it is a question of how severe is it? Now, the first thing I would do is drop the dog in height. I'm going to refer you to my friend, [Kim Collins](#) up in BC, Canada.

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She is a great reference for dog jumping in general. And I would just drop her a line and ask her if you can send her a video and ask for her opinion. Should you continue to do agility? It could be dangerous for your dog, but not always.

Some dogs', jumping actually can improve with jump program like Kim's. Some dogs' jumping, once you lower the jumps, it actually takes away a lot of the problems. So, there's a lot of things you can do.

However, if it's a, you know, horrific problem where the dog's landing on top of the jumps and you're jumping at a high height, it could be dangerous. So, you really need to have somebody look at that video and give you their expert opinion.

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Okay. *Over arousal in the agility ring.* The topic, not necessarily in the agility ring, but I'm preparing [my talk for APDT](#) which is going to happen next week. And it's all about shaping high drive dogs. I've talked a lot about [high drive dogs](#) here on the podcast.

But with respect to agility in particular, I really think that a lot of times that an over aroused dog in agility can be a function of lack of clarity or over frustration. So, I'm going to refer you to episode on Shaped by Dog here. There's a couple that I spoke specifically about that problem.

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How often a sport dog should see specialists and which ones? Oh, that's a great question. Specialists. Here are the specialists my dogs see routinely. They see a massage specialist, somebody who does massage on them every single week.

And I like to rotate between two or three different specialists. Routinely, Chelsea who works here does most of the massaging on the dogs. I get one other set of hands once a month, and then somebody else who just to give different opinions.

Everybody has a different modality of how they do things. So, massage. I like osteopath or chiropractic. Some people in the Europe, I think they call it physiotherapy, but it's all about making sure the dog is in alignment and that they are functional in their movements.

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And so, myself, I've mentioned this several times, I love getting my dogs evaluated on a regular basis, starting when they're a year old with [Debbie and Sherman Canapp](#), probably the world's authority on sports orthopedics. And I just like to get a baseline of what are their range of motion and their joints and their gait, what that looks like.

And then if there's ever a question, I have something to go back to with a baseline. So, how often, it really depends on how close or how accessible an expert is. And with respect to body work, I think something routinely when we're doing anything that's physically active for the dog.



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Neutering. When or when do I not neuter? Also, how to handle high sexual arousal for intact dogs.
Okay, neutering. There's just so many questions. Obviously, in North America, neutering is the go-to thing. I personally would never neuter a dog before two to three years of age unless there is a real need for it.

So, if it's a pet dog family and the dog is a real handful with respect to seeking out the affections of other female dogs, and it's too much to handle, then yeah, there's a behavioral reason for that neutering. There's just so many papers now that show that spaying or neutering dogs early actually leads to a larger number of known cancers.

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So, more recent literature is available on that. Used to be people said that you know, memory tumors in females or pyometra is you know, such a terrible thing. Everybody should spay or neuter their dogs before they're a year old. But you know there's countries like Norway that spaying or neutering is illegal unless it's a life-or-death situation for the dogs.

So, really the answer is it depends. So, I had Swagger neutered when he was nine years old because he had a heart problem, and I didn't want him to become too over aroused because I have females that would come into heat routinely here in the house. So, that was the reason I had him neutered.

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So, I would do some digging, do some research and make an educated decision. So, everybody's got an opinion but do what's best for you and your dog and your situation. And with respect to sexual arousal, I mean, I guess, what are you calling sexual arousal, because sometimes people see their dog humping and they think that's sexual arousal and it is really just excitement.

Has nothing to do with their sex hormones at all. So, yeah, just do some digging. Okay. This was more of a statement than a question. And it was, *I feel like crap when I lose my patience*. And I think if everybody is in tuned with their emotions and really grounded, I think everybody would feel like crap when they lose their patience, whether it be with their dog, their family members or coworkers, somebody driving in traffic or themselves.

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So, you know, you need to give yourself grace, know that we're just human, we're doing the best we can, and you know, work at 'how can I do better'. And I think for me, it always comes down to asking a better question.

The only reason that I might lose my patience is when my expectations of whoever, my dog, my coworkers, whoever, myself is unwarranted. So, ask yourself a better question. If what I think is true wasn't true, what could be true? I love that question.

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If that wasn't true, what else might be true? I'm going to give you a reference to [podcast episode number 230](#), 'Finding Joy Amidst Frustration', where I talked about how I would feel bad about myself and some of the training decisions that I made earlier in my career.

Okay, another question about training more than one dog in a household. I obviously just did a podcast episode on that one, and so the question is, *how do I train more than one dog at a time?* And I will refer you to [podcast episode number 181](#).



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The one I did this week was on walking a dog, but 181 was about the routine I always did for the last 30 years. Now it's changed in you know, more recently because I've got more sophisticated. I used to involve my couch in all of my training, my you know, living room furniture.

I now use like raised dog beds or just dog beds because I have plenty of dog beds around my house. So, teaching dogs to relax and wait their turn is a big part of being able to live calmly in a multi-dog household.

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Okay, lots of questions that just are, that comments that just came in, *reactivity, reactive dogs*. *Reactivity, if you don't have the ability to keep a dog away from all the triggers*. We have a playlist over on YouTube on [reactive dogs](#), and honestly, it really depends on what level of reactivity that you are seeing.

And you very well might need a Veterinary Behaviorist to help you. But certainly, one of the questions that came in that said, *I need help practicing greeting people on leash when my dog shows leash reactivity, lunging, growling, jumping*. Well, that dog shouldn't be asked or expected to greet people on leash. They're telling you with their behavior, that's feedback that, "I don't feel comfortable in this environment."

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So, you need to, I'm assuming it's a puppy. If it isn't a puppy, you probably are going to need a professional to help you with this, but you need to listen to your dog and not have them be that close to people. I know I've mentioned on this podcast, when I was sharing This!'s story as a 12- to 14-month-old puppy, she was terrified of people.

She was born during COVID, and you know, we couldn't get out very much. And so, she was terrified of children, holy smokes. And men were the two biggies and dogs. Okay she had three biggies, children, men, and dogs.

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And now This! is my anchor dog, meaning I take her along when I want a puppy to see how to be calm and centered and grounded amongst people, dogs, children, men, it doesn't matter. This!y is just like the model. And so, it can be done as long as you accept the feedback that your dog is giving you and don't expect like so many people say, "Well, give this person some cookies and let your dog take cookies from their hand."

No, no. I would get far enough away that my dog could comfortably play games with me. Play a retrieve game, play a tug game, do some [hand targeting](#). There's a lot of [games on my YouTube channel](#) that you play at a distance.

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So, the dogs learn that whatever they're afraid of now is just white noise. You stay far enough away that the dog does not care. And then the next time out you can go a little closer and then a little further away.

It's like you are giving the dog little doses of what they're afraid of in an environment that they're never going to show fear. They're never going to go, "what, what, what, what?" They're just going to be calm and focused with you. And eventually they're going to be, "Oh, well, this actually is a good place."



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And I did that with This!y at the Baseball Diamonds. I would go there almost every other day during the summer when she was coming up on her second birthday. And I guess before that, the summer before that, when she had just turned one, I went there a little bit, but I had to stay a big periphery away back then.

So, the bottom line is, trust your dog, take that feedback and adjust your training based on your dog's confidence and joy. We do not want the dog to show fear reactions or growling or lunging at anybody or anything. Therefore, get them out of that environment and work on the periphery. Super, super important. And don't be afraid to get the help of a professional to help you on this.

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Okay, *how do I set my dog up for even more success if he gets easily frustrated?* So, I'll give you a link to a episode on [over aroused or frantic or frustrated or out of control dogs](#), but it might not be that. Your dog might be getting frustrated and just give up.

You know, I've talked about the book [Frustration Theory](#) where dogs have four different responses to frustration that they're born with, but we can change those. So, some dogs, their response to frustration is just, "I don't get this. I don't get it, and I give up."

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What we want to do with those dogs is not say, "Oh, why are you giving up so early?" We want to turn it on ourselves. How can I set the environment so that I'm going to fill you with confidence and then give you a small challenge?

So, if you go to Vito Game, [Shaped by Dog episode number 281](#). In that episode, it's a simple game, the Vito Game, where I show you how you can get the dog problem solving. So, for the dogs that get frustrated, we need to be better at manipulating the environment to help our dogs see solutions in their training, not have them be overwhelmed.

And then when we want them to work out some problem solving, set up a simple scenario, much like the Vito game, where they are problem solving all on their own, that's giving them the confidence to work through even tougher problems in the future.

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How do I use play to reinforce a cue? Can play replace food as a reinforcer? Okay, this is a double answer. And the first answer is a toy, or a game is a reinforcer. So, if the dog does the behavior, so ask for something you know the dog is going to respond to. A sit, a down, whatever, a trick. And when they do it, say your cue to tug.

So, I say, "strike", is my dog's cue to grab that toy. So, you can use that and that's what I would do in environments like when you're away from home and you want the highest rated reinforcement that your dog wants in those environments so that we can build up focus for you and confidence in the dog.

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However, when you are at home, this is what I would encourage you to do. Is ask the dog for a simple behavior you know that they will want. Give them a high value food reward. Wait until they've eaten it. And then from behind your back, pull out their favorite toy and say, "get that thing." Do that like several times a day as a surprise. And what's going to happen is the value for the toy gets put into the food. And very quickly, you can lower the value of the food and have several different types of food rewards.



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And maybe you can do two behaviors before you pull out the high value toy. That's how we get a transfer of value from the toy to the food. But you're going to start with that toy being hidden. So, the dog takes the food and swallows it before you pull out the toy.

Now, if you know the dog's going to be so-so on the food, you might ask them to sit and get really excited say, "good boy!" And then you run and tell them, "Get it, get it, get it, get it!", and have them chase around your body as you then toss the food so that you're adding more excitement to the process of eating the food.

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You might have to do that the first few times. Eventually that excitement, the game of chase that you've put into the food helps to bump up the value of the food for the dog. Because ultimately, we want the flexibility of being able to train our dogs with anything, including just praise. But that comes by using a great transfer of value process.

Okay, and our final question, *herding, nipping when overexcited and herding breeds*. So, you don't mention the age of the puppy or dog. I'm going to right off the bat refer you to [Shaped by Dog episode number 215](#), where we talked about working with nipping dogs. Honestly, nipping dogs need to be, again, take that as feedback.

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When is the dog nipping? Are they on leash? Probably they're off leash. Probably they've been allowed to rehearse certain behaviors. So, you need to say, how can I create a more appropriate environment for a dog at this stage? So, maybe they're tired. Overtired puppies tend to nip a lot more. Or you've got children, and they're stimulated by the children running.

And that is going to be something that you're going to need to manage while you build a more appropriate response for that dog in the stimulation of something moving because herding dogs are bred to herd. And for many of them, part of the herding process involves using their mouth. And so, it's innately who they are.

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And so, creating an inappropriate response through the differential reinforcement of something that is going to be impossible for them to do at the same time. It could be when the kids are around, you hold a toy in their mouth. So, it's impossible to nip when you've got that toy. It could be, you know, they have places, hop it up in their bed that they can go.

But really and truly, it involves engaging that dog in regular training sessions like our Recaller Games or our Home School the Dog games that give them structure and focus and how to be appropriate because we want them to fit into our world, but they have different drives than we do.

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And so, as humans, we need to respect the innate drives of each breed and not focus on, how do I stop this, but how can I help that dog fit better into our world. And that's going to involve some planning and some work on your part, unless you're in one of our programs.

So, it's all about taking the feedback from the dog and saying, how can I guide that dog's current drive away from the nipping, jumping up, biting, whatever it is that that dog is doing and towards focus for work or holding a toy when something is stimulating you.



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Or an alternate behavior until they're old enough or at a stage in their life where when they can learn to watch kids run, get excited, and not feel the need to chase and bite. Alright, I hope all of this helps. I hope it all makes sense.

Please jump over to [my YouTube channel](#). There's just so much great training you'll find in the playlist. So, if you go to YouTube, click on a playlist. There's so many playlists. Whether you have a puppy, a reactive dog, a dog that you need more drive, a dog who has too much drive, you know there is a playlist there that will give you hours of help.

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And at the end of all of that, you still feel you need more personal help from us, contact us at wag@dogsthat.com and we can guide you to a program of ours that may help you help your dog be the absolute best family pet you could have ever dreamt of. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 282: How To Walk Multiple Dogs: Step-by-Step Guide To Stress-Free Walks](#)

[YouTube Livestream: Dog Agility: Create FUN & SUCCESS with These FOUR Focuses](#)

[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](#)

[Dr. Laurie Coger Healthy Dog Workshop](#)

[Healthy Dog Expo](#)

[Kim Collins: Pawsitive Steps Canine Sports Centre](#)

[2024 APDT Annual Conference](#)

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

[Canapp Sports Medicine](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 181: Training Multiple Dogs To Wait Turns And Relax](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Reactive or Aggressive Dogs: Key Insights with Susan Garrett](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Target Training for Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

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

[YouTube Playlist: Help for Over-Aroused, Over Excited, Hyper, Frantic, High Drive or Out of Control Dogs with Susan Garrett](#)

[Book: Frustration Theory- An Analysis of Dispositional Learning and Memory](#)

[Podcast Episode 281: How Vito's Thinking Games Will Transform Your Dog Training](#)

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

[DogsThat YouTube Channel](#)



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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