

My Dog Just STOPS On Walks! Overcoming Puppy Plunking To Get You Dog Moving

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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There's a super common problem that many of you listening to this podcast may have either have or experiencing with your puppy. And it's a problem that I can't say that I've ever had, but it is so common, I just have to talk about it.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. Have you ever experienced a puppy or young dog that just suddenly puts on the brakes on a walk and does not move. They might even like plunk themselves into a down to get better traction on earth, "No, I'm not moving forward." What do you do?

Well, what you do next has a massive impact on your dog or puppy. A lot of times this is a puppy. On your relationship with that dog or puppy and on the likelihood that this behavior is going to come back again.

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And for some of you, it might be happening again and again and again. Now let's talk about that. There's one of five reasons why a dog or puppy might do that. Honestly, it's not as likely that an older dog will do it unless they've been doing it since they were a puppy. More on that later.

Number one, the puppy might be in pain. Now, if that would be, 'this has never happened before', 'all of a sudden, the dog stops moving', you might see other signs of pain like their back gets roached, they lift a paw, whatever.

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So, first of all, we want to rule out the thought, the possibility that that puppy or dog is in pain. Number two, it could be that they're afraid. Maybe something just scared them, or maybe they've walked by this path before and they know that behind this fence, occasionally a big dog comes out and starts barking on the other side of the fence and it scares them.

So, if it's fear, and you know the fear, you can either avoid the fear by going on the other side of the road, or you can work to [counter condition the fear](#). Now fear is something we don't want to ignore because chances are it will grow in intensity if it is ignored. So, we definitely want to jump on dealing with that fear right now.

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The third reason it might happen is the puppy is just overwhelmed. Potentially, you're asking them to walk on wet grass and they're like, "Oh, I don't know about that." Or that you've been walking for way too long for the age of that puppy. Or they may have done some things like [pulled on a leash](#) or barked at somebody that may have annoyed you. Don't let that happen, right? And the puppy's just like, "Uncle, I give up."

Whatever that overwhelm is, your data collection here can really, really help. So, let's say it's something as simple as, 'I don't walk on wet grass.' It's very common with smaller breed dogs, but I have seen some bigger dogs that just don't want to go on wet grass either.



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So, again, acknowledge it, counter condition it, and avoid the wet grass until you have counter conditioned it. Something as simple as shaping them for going on a towel in your house, a dry towel. No problem at all. If you go to our YouTube channel, we've got a [step-by-step video on targeting](#). And that's going to come in handy a little later when I have some more homework for you.

Once that dog happily will jump on this towel, you're going to get it wet. Bring it out. It's a little damp. Maybe even bring it out, it's damp, but it's not like sopping wet. They're going to be a little bit more reluctant, but give them high value rewards, shape them to get on and off and on and off and on and off.

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Then the next time you bring this towel out, they're going to be excited about jumping on it. Now we're going to put it in the freezer. It's going to be wet and cold. Jumping on and off, jumping on and off, jumping on and off. Now bring a little pool, kiddie pool into your living room. Put it in the kiddie pool.

They'll jump in and on and get the cookies. Eventually, you're going to add a little water to that towel and a little more until they're actually jumping into a wet pool. Once you've got that, I'm pretty confident you can take that wet towel to any wet grass. They're going to jump on it. And before you know it, they're walking on wet grass.

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It's so simple, but you have to isolate what is that puppy or dog overwhelmed with? Now, honestly, even that isn't the number one reason that I believe that puppies will put on the brakes. The number one reason is very likely number four or number five.

Number four would be that the puppy is frustrated, that they anticipate something is happening back there and they don't want to go forward. They want to go backwards. Something they like is back there. Something they've done before is back there. So, they put on the brakes and say, "I don't want more of that. I want more of that."

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Now, so that frustration causes them, "I don't know how to do.", they might bite at the leash, they might hop around, and eventually they might plunk, just plunk themselves right onto the ground, "I don't want to move forward." Now, what happens when that happens?

So, what many people will do is talk to the puppy. "Come on, buddy. Atta boy, atta boy, atta boy." Or they might say, "Mommy's got a cookie. Come on, mommy's got a cookie." And they get the puppy going with a cookie. All of that might be fair game.

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I might do the same thing the first time it happens, but then what happens when you get home? Do you just put that puppy away and forget about it? If you do, then you get to number five, which is a previously reinforced behavior.

The dog or the puppy plunks, you say, "Atta boy, atta boy, atta boy!", cheerlead them, coochie coo them, bring out cookies and they go, "Hey, if I plunk, good things happen." So, you're going to get plunking more and more frequently. Now I did say, I might give the cookies to get the puppy moving myself. But then when I get home, I don't forget about it.



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I say, how can I create more value for doing what I want and minimizing the frustration of what the puppy wants. And that's what we're going to talk about today. So, by reinforcing the puppy for moving, we are creating an antecedent arrangement whereby the thing before the thing, I talked about it in [podcast episode number 16](#).

What happens before the puppy gets that reinforcement? 'Oh, I was about to leave the park. I don't want to leave the park. I plunk. Well, when I plunk, then my mommy gets good cookies. So, as we're leaving the park, if I don't see the good cookies, I'm plunking.' Thing before the thing. So, what can we do about it?

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Well, in [podcast episode number 53](#), I talked about building value on your seam, the area we call the reward or [Reinforcement Zone](#). And so, I believe one of the big reasons why I don't ever have a dog or a puppy that plunks and says, "no", is because before I ever take a puppy out on a walk, I play a lot of games so that the puppy will tell you where the value is.

The value isn't walking home with you. The value is going that away. The value is doing something other than what you want me to do. And so, by playing these games, it's easy for me to change the value for that puppy. So, being seen on your seam, giving them cookies in Reinforcement Zone.

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This doesn't happen necessarily on the walk. This happens in your living room. You build up patterns that the puppy can predict. "Ooh, when I'm in this position, good things happen to me." And you build up to what I spoke about in [podcast episode number 76](#), where we're adding a distraction to that be seen on your seam.

Maybe we now have, as I gave you the step-by-step instruction in episode number 76, we are turning into the dog and giving them cookies. We then can do something like turn into the dog, say "search", and then walk forward again.

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So, now [we have some games](#). Throw that in with the hand target. And now we've got some games that we can play anywhere along the walk. So, a walk with the puppy really is about letting that puppy investigate their environment.

Yes, it's about getting them the opportunity to eliminate. Yes, it's an opportunity to maybe give them some exercise, but depending on the [age of the puppy](#), that really is not that necessary. It really is about getting them to figure out what is in their environment, allowing them to sniff along the way, and most of all, building value for moving with you. Building that relationship with you.

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Now, included in your walk, you might be taking the puppy to a place they love, like the beach, or a park where they get to maybe hike on trails. And so, now when you say, "it's time to go home", well, it was either walk home or stay at the beach, plunk. And so, here's what we're going to do.

When you know you're about to leave the beach or the park or whatever it is that is, you know you're approaching the trigger for the plunk. I don't care what it is. A friend of mine told me this weekend that the trigger is she's walking with her husband and somewhere along the way, her husband is going to go for a little jog and then meet up with them later.



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The moment the husband leaves on a jog, the puppy plunks. So, what can we do? We know the trigger. And so, what we're going to do is before we get to that trigger, we're going to turn away and play some of these games before we get the plunk. So, we might do a search game and then hubby goes for his little jog.

And then when the puppy comes back after grabbing the cookie, then we do a hand target. And maybe we might walk back in the opposite direction. And then maybe just jog one or two steps on your own. Bring out a tug toy and tug. If it's hiking or leaving the beach then what you're going to do is you might play some of these games, but let's say you want to leave the beach at eight o'clock in the morning.

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Well, at 7:45, you pack up and act like you're going to leave the beach. You put the leash on, you walk two steps, you do a hand touch, then you unclip the leash and say, "go play again." And now the puppy can't predict necessarily that the leash and you walking means a terminal end to their fun. You are going to do this for 15 minutes.

You're going to call them back. You're going to give them a cookie for coming when they were called. You're going to hook on the leash. You're going to walk maybe five steps, do a hand target, walk a few more, give a cookie in Reinforcement Zone, undo the leash and say, "you go play." You're going to do this.

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Eventually, you might only need to do this, one or two times, but if you build up while you're playing this game before the terminal end of the fun, you play the game of Reinforcement Zone, of search, although you might not want to do search on the sand. You're going to play these hand target, do a spin around my hip, and then send them back to play again.

Once you've done all that, it's easier to leave the park. You might actually walk right out of the park, walk past the gates, and then turn around and go back in. You've got 15 minutes because you wanted to leave at eight, but you have 15 minutes to play with. Leaving the park isn't the end of the park. We might even walk a half a block and then go back.

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And so, then you've eliminated the frustration for your puppy that 'every time you do this, it's the end of my fun'. Make sure when you're out at the beach that you are engaging that puppy routinely, that they are coming to you, that you are turning them around and asking for a hand target and then sending them back to the beach.

Because you know what that does? That makes the beach fun go through you. You become part of the value of the beach. So then when you're leaving the beach, guess what? You the value is leaving with that puppy. So, they're less likely to put on the brakes.

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Whatever that fun is, make sure that you are bringing that puppy back to you, engaging them in some sort of interactive game, and then send them back to the fun. The worst thing you could do is get to the beach or the trails and just let that puppy play until it's time to leave. That my friend is a guaranteed plunk. I promise you any puppy who can put one and one together, "Huh? I'm having all this fun by myself and now the end of fun. You are the end of fun."



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You don't want to be known as the end of fun. You want to be known as a big part of the fun. And so, start calling that dog back, letting them go, the fun goes through you. And whatever that trigger, find ways to build value around you.

Yes, this is about to happen, but whether it's frustration or overwhelm, it doesn't have to be those things because you are the source of reinforcement. The worst thing you could do is every time they plunk, you continue to give them cookies to get them going.

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Because then you're going to have a dog much like Tater Salad who came to us as a 15-month-old puppy who was the king of plunking. "Oh no, brakes on, I am not moving forward." And we worked at building value for playing with us. We worked at creating value for moving forward with us. It went away.

And then when we bring new people on the team here and they would take Tater Salad for a walk, lo and behold, he'd start plunking. After years of no plunking. We're just going to see, because it was such a heavily reinforced behavior when he was a puppy, it comes back with somebody new. Hey, maybe you will be like that person in my other life who was a really good reinforcer of the plunk.

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So, if it has been a reinforced behavior, we're going to get your puppy out of that by playing games at home. Don't try to just go off on a walk. Maybe your first walk after you've played those games in your living room, Reinforcement Zone, [perch work, pivots, and spins](#). It's all in those episodes that I spoke about. Once you've played games in your living room, you're going to go for a one-minute walk.

So, there'll be a landmark. Maybe there's like a fire hydrant, a few strides down your street. You're going to go down your front walk. You're going to go to the fire hydrant, hand touch, search, reinforcement zone, jog a few, stop, reinforcement zone, and go back home.

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There's your one minute. Then you can build up to maybe doing two minutes. So, whatever it is, I remember doing a consult with the owner of a Great Dane puppy who would put on the brakes and plunk 140 pounds of plunking when he knew he was on his way back home from their walk.

You've got to make sure you're connecting with that dog. Yes, let the puppy sniff, let them read the pee mail along the way, but take the opportunity to engage with that puppy, play some of the games that I've mentioned that don't involve putting a cookie on their nose and luring them somewhere.

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They're interactive games where they make choices, and you reinforce the good choice. And I promise you, the plunking will go away forever. I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.





Episode: #285

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Resources:

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

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

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

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

[Podcast Episode 53: Stop Your Dog Pulling on Leash and Start Walking Together](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 76: Leash Walking: Distracted, or Reactive Dog? These Games Will Help!](#)

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

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

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



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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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