

## Is Your Dog Really Being Spiteful?

### Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

### Transcript

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Calm dogs aren't screaming their heads off watching you train another dog. I would hope you wouldn't want that. I know your neighbors probably don't want that.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog, where dog training finally makes sense for both ends of the leash. I have a question for you: has there ever been a time when possibly your moderately well-behaved dog did something completely out of character to make you think the dog was being spiteful or vindictive or defiant?

If the answer is yes, you're not alone because I actually been there myself back in 1989. I had a year and a half old dog who, I brought in another dog to train for a friend, and when I was out training that puppy, my older dog actually pooped one little nugget on my pillow. And of course, my mind racing, I decided that Terrier was being vengeful because I was training another dog.

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Now jump forward to 2025 and after decades of dog training experience and a deep dive into understanding dog behavior I now know, no matter how much it seems true, that it's just not true. And there's two questions that you can use yourself to help you move through that period where you might be feeling 'he's just being a turd on purpose' to a place where you can think a little bit more graciously of your dog.

First question is, "If that's not true, what else could be true?" Meaning if he isn't just trying to be vengeful, what else might be true? And that could lead to the second question, which is, "Behavior is communication. What is this dog trying to communicate with me?"

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Now, the dog may sometimes be consciously trying to communicate something to you, and other times their behavior will be unconsciously communicating something with you. And why am I bringing this up today you may ask, good question.

I saw a post on social media by one of my students who has a new puppy and his 5-year-old dog who has been completely house trained now has started pooping in the house whenever he takes that puppy out to train. So, I'm going to share with you in this episode what is happening in this scenario, what likely is causing this to happen, and what you can do from preventing it from happening in the future.

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You know, it's easy to assume that this is a dog being spiteful. Because we as humans have a cognitive bias. We've seen it play out, but honestly, it's generally reserved for teenagers going through it or maybe exes that didn't end so well.

You know that song, 'I dug my keys into the side of his pretty little souped up—.' You get what I mean? So, there's a cognitive bias because we've seen vengefulness play out in movies and sometimes in real life.



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And by believing that it is spite or vengefulness, it allows us to find an answer quick. It gives us closure to the solution. There is a blame and the situation is closed. Now we have to stop the dog from being defiant, or vengeful, or spiteful. But here's the thing with blame. Blame always ends curiosity.

And curiosity is the most beautiful gift we all can give ourselves because curiosity builds bridges, curiosity creates conversation, even if it's just in our own head. So, let's get curious about what's happening to this student of mine.

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Of course, you can ask yourself simple questions like, "Why is this happening? What has changed in the last little while?" Well, it's obvious we've added the introduction of a new dog, and so you can just say, "And so what? What difference does that make? This dog knows they should not poop in the house."

I'm going to give you two examples of when stress causes a change in physiology. This past summer, I was training my young dog Prophet in Germany, and it was so hot. It was 40 degrees Celsius. That's like a ka-trillion degrees Fahrenheit. And after he worked a short—we had very short, short work sessions.

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He would immediately come out and have a massive poop. The stress to his physiology. Luckily, he never pooped while he was working, but also very luckily, I intentionally only allowed him to work for a very short period of time, only a matter of a couple of minutes. But three times in a row, he came out and had a massive poop.

Would he ever poop that much in that short period of time in his life? Never. But that stress causing a physiological reaction. In this case, it was actually a physical stress. It was heat-stress. But even the change of gut biome, maybe changing new food could cause that same kind of stress. That stress happened to me once.

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I had a medical procedure, which caused my calcium to drop, and all of a sudden shortly after that medical procedure, I started sweating profusely. I started shaking, and I had to get to a bathroom and yes, the same thing happened to me. Luckily, I was able to get to the bathroom. And so, stress causes physiological changes to us and to our dogs.

And so, the first thing I would always ask everybody is make sure there's no medical condition. Make sure that there [isn't a medical reason](#) for that dog. Maybe they have a GI upset, but I think there would've been signs before. And the connection of every time I go outside to train my puppy; this is what happens often can be a rule out of medical conditions.

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But even something as simple as a change in their diet can cause a GI upset, which cause the housebreaking to kind of fault of pieces. But if we've ruled all that out, now let's look at potential stressors.

Have you moved? Like even you might be going on extended stay somewhere and your dog is staying in a hotel, and they've never stayed in a hotel. That can cause some problems where the dog might stress. Your dog may be fine alone at home, but maybe not so much in a hotel.



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So, beware if you're [taking your dog on the road](#). Be prepared for this. The solution I have for my student is going to be the same solution, or very similar solution, you can use if you're taking your dog into a new environment.

[Maybe going to your families for Christmas](#), and your dog's never been there before, maybe they have another dog. All of this compounding stress may have a physiological effect on the dog that they absolutely have no control over.

So, what might be happening with this adult dog? Now, it could be something as simple as "I hear Dad having fun. Dad always has fun with me. I should be out there having fun. Why am I not out there?"

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It could be something even more intense than that. "My dad is training. My dad needs me. I'm always out there helping my dad training. How do I get to my dad? He needs me. I've got to be there. That's my job as a dog. I can't let my dad down. I've got to be doing my job."

So, it could be the stress of not being able to train. It could be the stress of "I know good things happen out there and I need to be there." It could be "My dad needs me, what's going on?"

It also could be an attachment to the new puppy that "I love being out with my puppy friend and why can't I be there?" What we've done is change a routine. 'It's always been you, that's been out there training with me.'

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And when I get a new puppy, the transition is real for all of my adult dogs, and so I am very intentional about how I make that transition, so I don't have any dogs unnecessarily stressing themselves. So how do I go about making this transition?

(Hey, if this episode is helping you to see your dog a little bit differently, well that's what we do here every week. So, subscribe and let's keep that relationship growing.)

I got to tell you; it's one of the biggest reasons I am slow to add a new puppy to my home because it breaks my heart to put my dog into that situation where they aren't going to be the focus of every single training session. And so, let's always go back to the three E's: exercise, engagement, and enrichment.

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So, I'm going to number one, make sure that that dog gets a full complement of exercise prior to me ever going out to train the other dog. Number two, I'm going to make sure that the adult dog gets engaged and [involved in the training of the young dog](#).

And I talked about this on Shaped by Dog, [episode number 181](#), where I share my strategy is first, before I separate those dogs and tell my dog, "You just have to suck it up because I'm training another dog," I allow them to be together. So that's where I take full advantage of what we call [Hot Zones](#), where one dog stays in a station.

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It could be the crate in the case of a puppy. And the focus of that training is just 'You stay there, you stay there. And I can reward either of you at any time.' It's not about fun, high level, engaging training. It's just about this is what's going to happen.



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My goal is for both the new puppy and my adult dog, it should be a reminder of my adult dog, to be completely calm and relaxed when they're around other dogs being trained. That just makes my life so much happier, so much easier.

And I make it a priority when I get a new puppy. But maybe you haven't done that and it's okay. You can do it now. You can go to Shaped by Dog podcast [episode number 191](#) and do the relaxation protocol. And that is one thing that will take you one step closer.

So let me fast forward to what I have today. I can bring multiple dogs out to train and have them all stay on Hot Zones, and I can take one dog at a time and train. I can also have one of those dogs go in a crate while I train the other dog.

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Now, I will tell you upfront, that is difficult to get to with the crate closed. It's much easier for the dogs if the crate door is open. It's like they're in control. But I like to get to a place where the crate will be closed. I can also put one of my dogs in this training area. We have a small bedroom right off of the turf, and I can just let one of my dogs hang out there.

All of my dogs are completely fine relaxing in the bedroom, relaxing in a crate, or hanging out and watching. Most of the time it's hanging out and watching. But if it's going to be a long session, I will put them in the bedroom because I really don't need them watching, because if they're watching, they're generally a little bit more engaged.

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So, there's the ultimate goal. Have options for yourself. [Crate Games](#) is an amazing start to teach a dog. You can just chill here until it's your turn. [Episode number 181](#) will give you the strategy to get to that place. But what else can we do?

First step, you're going to work the two dogs together. Second step is you're going to help the adult dog be comfortable with you leaving the house with the young puppy. And so it might be, "I'm going to give you a food puzzle. I'm going to walk out the door into the backyard for 30 to 45 seconds." Hopefully it's an easy food puzzle, so the dog will be done just as you're coming back in the door.

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You want to give that dog enrichment while you're going out. Now you're not going to do any loud training in the backyard yet. That's adding complexity and intensity to the distraction that we're giving this adult dog. We're first, we need to grow the adult dog's comfort level with being in a different room where they can still hear the training.

And so that will grow to, 'I'm going to go out there for a minute. I'm going to come back'— and the dog would've been given some sort of enrichment activity and we've got lots of them here on Shaped by Dog. Just go to Shaped by Dog [episode number 314](#) and [315](#) to get the full complement of ideas for enrichment.

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You're going to build this up until you can go in the backyard. Now you can do something that's quieter, maybe [work some fitness](#) with the dog, but nothing that's loud and exciting and tugging and yahoo. We want that dog in the house to have a calm environment, working through an engagement activity.



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Ideally, you're going to work up to three minutes. At three minutes or longer, I like to leave the dog in the house with something like a big meaty bone or a [stuffed Toppl](#), and you're going to go out for two to three minutes, come back and trade.

This is a good point. We're going to trade the dog with a big meaty bone for something that's equal value, maybe higher value, but it's just a treat. "Oh, here, I'll take the Toppl and you can have this big hunk of roast beef." Why do I do that?

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Because I want the adult dog to know me leaving with the puppy means, "You get a very reinforcing activity alone." So that instead of the dog going, "Where are you going? Why, why am I not there?" the dog's going, "Okay, can you leave? I'd like you to leave now. Good things are going to happen when you leave, so get out."

And that's how we're going to change the comfort level of the dog being left alone. When you've got that, now you can go back to a 30-second training session but have some yeeha and yahoos out there. Come on back in and reward the dog for not pacing, stressing, pooping, or barking.

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Remember, calm dogs aren't at the windows screaming their heads off watching you train another dog. I would hope you wouldn't want that. I know your neighbors probably don't want that, and it's not good for anybody.

So, strategy: exercise, engagement, enrichment. Work so that you can have dogs out there together, calm, waiting your turn. At first, you're not doing any training that's going to be any of any value, nothing high activity.

And then work to leaving the adult dog alone while you go out and do something passive with a puppy or just sit out on the steps for 30 seconds, building up to three minutes, big meaty bone time, or overstuffed Toppl, whatever it is.

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You want to go to a higher value enrichment activity for that dog so that the dog left alone gets the sense that, "Oh, this is different. It always used to be me going out with my dad, but sometimes it's not me going out with my dad. This is different, and right now it's okay."

Does this mean that every time you want to train the puppy for the next three years, you have to give the adult dog something amazing? No, we're just helping with the transition. Remember I said right off the top, when we are bringing a puppy into an environment where the older dog has been used to being the dog that gets all the training, there's a transition period.

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And during that transition period, you have to be intentional about reducing the stress for the older dog so that they get used to this new normal. That still includes training for them but also includes an enrichment activity while the other puppy gets trained.

Remember, when we choose curiosity over instantly assuming the worst and [assigning blame](#), we open the bridge of communication, which deepens the trust that our dogs have in us. Our dogs are communicating through their behavior every day.





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And when we listen to that communication, well, that's when everything changes. Thanks for joining me today. And until next time, stay humble, stay curious, keep working to make life better at both ends of the leash. And I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

### Get Crate Games Online:

[Crate Games Online](#)

### Resources:

[Podcast Episode 189: All The Things That Influence Your Dog's Behavior And What Behavior Tells You](#)

[Podcast Episode 154: Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All](#)

[Podcast Episode 128: Reduce Stress For Dogs During Holiday Celebrations](#)

[Podcast Episode 72: Preventing Dog Aggression: Introducing Dogs or Puppies with Project Togetherness](#)

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

[Podcast Episode 266: Hot Zone And Stays – How One Dog Training Nuance Can Fix Anxiety And Duration.](#)

[Podcast Episode 191: Get Your Dog To Calm Down With This Common Sense Protocol For Relaxation](#)

[Podcast Episode 314: Dog Enrichment Secrets Part 1: Using Your Dog's Natural Instincts To Build Variety And Engagement](#)

[Podcast Episode 315: Dog Enrichment Secrets Part 2: 30 Day Enrichment Challenge + Free Planner PDF](#)

[\\*West Paw Zogoflex Toppl Treat Dispensing Dog Toy Puzzle](#)

[Podcast Episode 317: 20 Exercises That Help Your Dog Live Longer: Start Today!](#)

[Podcast Episode 20: Bridging the Gap Between Blame and Kindness in Dog Training](#)



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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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