

Solve Your Dog's Separation Anxiety With FRIDA: Expanding Calm With Functional Relaxation

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG If you've ever owned or seen a dog that suffers from extreme separation anxiety, you know how heartbreaking that can be. Today, I'm going to share with you a 10-step protocol that's going to turn the dog training world on its head, because it's like nothing that's ever been shared before.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to our 200th episode of Shaped by Dog! And I just want to give a shout out to every one of you who have listened to our podcast and thank you from my entire team for supporting our podcast and helping us get to this 200th episode. And what an episode it is. I'm going to share a case study. I'm going to introduce you to two students of mine.

Now, I may be a little bit biased, but I think these two young ladies are the up and coming in the space of dog training in Europe, and they cover so many areas both of pet dog ownership, of behavior, and of sport.

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I first met Nadine Hehli when I was teaching a seminar in Europe, and she came over on a mentorship three times from Europe to work with me. Now Nadine's partner Simone Fasel has a special interest in behavior. She studied behavior after she graduated from university, and together they are like a powerhouse of dog training expertise. And I'm proud to call them my students.

Now, the two of them adopted a dog last year. It was, I don't know, it looks like a Pointer, Whippet kind of a cross. Little did they know that this dog had severe separation anxiety, on top of being a very active hyper dog.

Now for whatever reason, the dog attached itself to Nadine more so than Simone. So, Nadine could not even leave the room or the dog would scream and claw and urinate. Even if Simone and the other dogs were in the room. That's how severe separation anxiety can be.

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It is real and unfortunately for the people who have it, there's often some guilt or shame that they've done something. You know what, sometimes guys, it just happens. But after today's podcast, you're going to have a solution on how to help your dog overcome it.

Now, Nadine and Simone understood that the typical approach to overcoming separation anxiety was not going to work with a dog with such an extreme case of it. Typically, I mean there's some really good things that people will try for separation anxiety. Some will say like, "Stuff some toys so that the dog will eat or play games with food toys." But the problem is if the dog is that anxious, they may not even look at the toys. They won't take food when they're in that kind of an anxious state.

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Others may say, "Just exercise the dog more, exercise the dog more." But that doesn't help the dog when you're not there because they still have attached themselves to one person. Actually, that person has become a little bit of an obsession of theirs.



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Or they may say, as I've said in the past, you're just going to have to work up a protocol of you know, leave the room for just a short period of time, come back in, leave the room for a short period of time, come back in.

The problem with that protocol, well there's three things. Number one, you are still the biggest reinforcement. So, the dog will be anxiously waiting for you to come back. Problem number two is you're working from a place of fear. So the chance for an extinction burst, even if you get partway through it for the dog to just break down and go back to that frantic anxiety is very, very high because you're just trying to grow periods of no fear by leaving the room or leaving the house and coming back, leaving and coming back.

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Now the third problem with that is, it's kind of tedious, long, and boring. You're standing outside your home waiting to go back in and if you live here in Canada, you know you might be cold. Okay, small minor detail. But the problem with traditional approaches is you start with a dog in fear. You start with a dog in anxiety. And you're just trying to you know, give them a little short dose of that anxiety so that you can come back.

But the dog is always operating from a place of anxiety. Enter the FRIDA Protocol. Yes, named after Nadine and Simone's dog, Frida. FRIDA Protocol: Functional Relaxation Improving Dogs' Anxiety. And the difference is we're starting from a place of calm, and we're growing that calm and then building a barrier around that calm.

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And so, when you do leave your dog, you're leaving them in a fortress of calm. And so, the chance of that extinction burst is very, very low. The protocol is fun to work through and guess what, it happens pretty darn fast. Because Simone and Nadine have now taught this to their own students over in Switzerland and France and they actually have [an online program](#), if you speak German, in German, for the Frida protocol. It's working exceptionally well. And I'm going to share it with you. I got permission. Yeah, I got permission.

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Let's start first with the equipment that you're going to need. And yes, this might cost you some money but guess what, if you had a chance to look at any of the posts that people put on Facebook when I said, "If you ever had a dog that has separation anxiety, can you share the damage that's been done?" You know that the cost of the equipment I'm going to suggest is so small compared to the damage that a dog in that state can do.

Plus, what's your dog's peace of mind worth? Who wants to put their dogs in that kind of anxiety? So, the equipment, let's start small. Stuffable toys like [Toppls](#) are my favorite, but it doesn't matter what the brand name. Things that you can stuff, because licking is calming.

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And yes, before you say, "Susan, my dog when they're anxious, they won't eat." Stick with me. They're going to. Stuffed toys that are rollable or droppable that the dog has to pick them up and drop them and move them to get the food out, so that it's more of an investigative and hunting and sniffing. A [Snuffle Mat](#). Now, I personally like Snuffle Mats with plastic backing, but the rubber backing is fine as well. I would try to get one that's 10 inches by 20 inches at the minimum, you want a nice big one.



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A small one is fine if that's all you can get. But a nice big one, the dog will learn to actually target and lay on that. Not a bad thing. Next some [cozy dog beds](#). The kind that has the sides that the dog can snuggle bug into. One will do. But hey you know, if you're anything like me, if one will do then 30 or 40 will be amazing!

You are going to need barriers like an [ex-pen](#) or a threshold barrier to go across a door in your home. Now the really fun toys you're going to need, you're going to need a remote feeder. This is non-negotiable.

You're going to need a remote feeder. You can buy some used ones. I'll leave a link of the show notes to [my favorites](#), but you can get them for well under a hundred dollars. You can get the [PetGeek](#) is probably the least expensive one. The [Treat & Train](#). The Pet Tutor is the Cadillac of them all.

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Any one of those will do for what we're going to be doing today. Finally, you're going to need a Wi-Fi camera. And again, I'll [put a link](#) in the show notes, the one that I've used. And it allows you to see what the dog is doing when you're not in the room.

So those are all the things that you need upfront. Now, there's a couple prerequisites that you need in place before we start the protocol.

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Number one, the dog needs [regular exercise](#). Now, if you have a very, like a really active high drive dog that has separation anxiety, that exercise really is going to be off leash running. So, you need a secure area, fenced in area where the dog can just go. And ideally that's happening every single day. If not, take that dog hiking because yes, exercise is a part. It's not the whole part of it, but it's part of getting that excess energy out of the dog before you leave them.

Number two, nutrition. Now, listen closely to this one. I mentioned in [podcast number 189](#), there are some things you can't dog train. And nutrition was the single most important thing that I discovered with my dog This! when I just couldn't figure out what her problem was over the first two years of her life.

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Think about this. If you were eating Oreos and potato chips, or just coffee and chocolate all day long, your behavior would be different, wouldn't it, than if you had a really good wholesome diet of some nice, fresh, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and whatever else you want to add to that. Diet is huge.

So, if your dog's eating a kibble, maybe try raw. But I would suggest if you're feeding raw, most raw comes in a protein base of 50% to 80%. You want to get that down to like 30%.. You want to try higher fat or lower carbs, so you can just get your raw, cut it in half and add fruits and vegetables to that. Alright, so nutrition is a big key.

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I asked Nadine and Simone, "Do you two think you would've had the success you had, had you not changed Frida's nutrition?" They said, "Absolutely no way." That was a big, big part of this. So, nutrition definitely is a key. So, we have our foundation of regular exercise and nutrition.

The third foundation is choice-based training. So, if you are in Home School the Dog or Recallers, you have already taught your dog that they can be in control of how they earn the reinforcement.



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Choice-based training means the dog has autonomy that we recognize the dog's right, and they get engaged with the training because they're making their own choices. So really, really big. Now the next thing you may have already started and that I mentioned in [podcast episode number 191](#), and that is functional relaxation, teaching your dog to just chill.

Ideally, you've already conditioned your dog to a mat on the floor, that is a place of relaxation. But we're going to grow that just for these dogs that have separation anxiety. So those are your prerequisites. Not a big deal, right? Now before we can jump into the 10-step protocol, I want to remind you what calm looks like for your dog.

And you might be reminding me, but first let's look at [what does an anxious dog look like](#). You probably could see the whites of their eyes, they're so big. Their ears are likely pinned, they're stress panting. They might be like, pacing and if you've got the kind of floor that you can see that their pads are wet because they're sweating through their pads because they're anxious. Where's their tail? Up along their belly. They could even be shaking. Their body would be low. I mean, it's obvious that this dog is worried.

Now what does your dog look like physically when they're relaxed? Their eyes are soft. Their ears are soft. Their mouth is closed. Their eyes might even be squinting a little bit. Their body's soft. Their tail might have a slow wag. They might have their head on their paws, or they might be curled up, they might be laying flat out.

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Know your dog. Know what relaxation looks like. That's what we're going for right now. Now, let's jump into those 10 steps. Step number one, we're going to really work on your functional relaxation. If you haven't done much with that, this is the time. This is the most important step. This is the step you're going to spend the most time. We just want to shape the dog to chillax, to lay down on that mat.

And we want to grow that relaxation so they'll stay there uninterrupted for 20 or 30 minutes. Yes, we're going to start small. You're going to just hang out with your dog in a closed room or a room that they don't have a lot of opportunity to roam about.

And you're going to start right near the dog and you're going to put a cookie down on that mat. Moderate to low value cookie. Your mechanics are key. You're going to move slow, at first, you're not even going to say anything to the dog. I would say don't look at the dog, watch them peripherally, but don't stare at the dog.

And you're going to just bend down and rather than tossing the cookie, you're just going to drop it onto that mat. If the dog will leave you alone, you could sit for this like sit on a chair. If you're doing it in a bedroom, sit on the bed. Now, if that's going to engage the dog that they're going to jump on you then stand for now, but eventually we want to sit. So, the dog comes back, they might just be standing on the mat, I don't care. I don't care.

Eventually, especially if you've done the relaxation protocol that I mentioned in episode number 191, they're going to go into a down, and then you can just feed. You don't have to like give them their whole meal, just hang out and at different intervals, just give them a cookie.

If they get up, that's fine. They come back, give them some more cookies, one at a time, slow. Not in a rhythmic pattern because when that rhythm breaks the dog's going to leave. Okay, so just at a variable interval, give them a cookie. At first, it's going to happen pretty frequently, but then spread it out longer.



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Eventually the dog's going to hang out and just go to sleep. "You're boring. I'll just hang out on my mat because I love my mat." Because you conditioned it, right? Stay at this step. Go back to it many times, you can even go to different rooms. Actually, it'd be ideal if you would go to different rooms because eventually, we want your dog to be able to roam when you're out of the house.

And if they go into a room that they've never been in, they might get anxious because, "Oh my gosh, I've not been conditioned to be relaxed in this room." Alright, so relaxation, take your time. You don't have to click. You don't have to go "Good dog!" Just get that dog laying down for 20 or 30 minutes. You can be there.

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So, step one in the protocol is the exercise and nutrition. Step two is the choice-based learning. Step three, functional relaxation. We're onto step four. So, step four is building duration for you hanging out with your dog, and your dog has just learned to relax.

Step five, you cannot start with this stage, guys. If you do, this won't work. I want you to introduce the remote feeder and the Wi-Fi camera. If your dog's never seen this feeder before, make sure you condition it somewhere else as well as that camera, because they both are going to make noise and we don't want that noise to spook your dog. So, it's a great time to introduce it when you're in the room and the dog's obsessing about the remote feeder.

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We are going to swap out you for a remote feeder. Yes, you can be replaced by a machine. Your dog is obsessed with you. We want them to become obsessed with the remote feeder. It's a transfer of value. So, all that we're going to do is you can put the remote feeder right in front of the dog on their bed.

And you're just going to carry on with the relaxation protocol except this time you're pushing a button. The dog's going to be like, "If I just hang out here and worship at the temple of my remote feeder, I can get cookies?" "Yes, you can."

Now, that leaves you the opportunity to move around that room. We're just going to move the camera in after the dogs had some reinforcement from that remote feeder. So, again, what are the signs of relaxation? Those are the things you are selecting on.

So, if my dog was standing, I would hit the remote feeder, if they laid down, I'd hit it again. If they put their paws on their head, I'd hit it. Once you get them into that relaxed state, you don't have to be looking for anything. You're just reinforcing them for hanging out at the remote feeder.

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Step number six, this is where it gets super exciting. We are now going to fade in a part of a barrier. Now what does that look like? If you have an ex-pen, you can just open it up to three panels so it's secure, and you're going to put the one panel in front of the remote feeder and the other two kind of out to the side.

So now when you move around the room, the dog's kind of barriered in but surprise, the dog can move around that barrier. No big deal. It's just three panels and it's fine if he moves around that barrier, you just stand still. When he chooses to go back in the direction of the remote feeder, hit the remote and he gets a cookie, then help him get back into his relaxation position.



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And then you can just keep, you know, I don't want you running and pacing. Just go to a new location, hit the remote. You're not going to immediately go right behind the barrier when it's set up. Stay with your dog and help them to relax. Then go out beside it, come in behind it, then go around it. For most dogs, they're not even going to notice this.

Now you can use something like a table. You know, if you have a long six-foot table and put it on its side, you could even start with a chair on its side. Just something that is a barrier between you and your dog. But we want that barrier to start to be introduced to the dog and they don't care. You're moving around, not a big deal.

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Now we're going to grow the barrier. So, for this step you might take your dog's bed, put it right by the threshold of your room, and put a gate across that. Now again, grow it. I would start it with the three panels of your ex-pen. Moving it to a different spot in your room shouldn't be a big deal because you could move it to all different rooms and your dog's like, "Yeah, I got this. My bed's here. My target mat is here. My remote feeder is here. I'm good."

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Now you can put that remote feeder up a little higher. Put a snuffle mat under there. And now you can like hit a couple of times while the dog's eating one, few more treats are falling in that snuffle mat, and it gives him something to do while he's just hanging out there. "Oh look, there's cookies in here. A little investigation."

So, we've now added a barrier that goes across the door. You're just going to step on the other side of that barrier, or if it's got a gate, you can walk through. Walk through and just hang out and keep playing this game relaxation, reinforcement.

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These steps, if you've done your job with step number three in teaching that functional relaxation, you should breeze through these steps pretty darn fast. So now we've got the dog behind a barrier in the room, and you can leave the front of the barrier. You've got your phone that's got the camera.

Now the dog might get up and go, "Where? I can't see you anymore." And you're going to be watching on the camera. What does the dog do? They might whimper a bit, that's okay. If the dog has a complete meltdown and you actually get that anxiety all coming back because you're experiencing an extinction burst, get back in the room.

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We'll call it a fail, no big deal. You just have to go slower with your progress of growing that barrier. But if the dog's just like, "Hey, where are you going?" I just wait until they might look back in the room, then you can hit the remote feeder.

So eventually that dog's going to go back. Now this is the first step to you've left the room. For most dogs if you've built that up correctly, they're not going to care. "I'm sorry. You've been replaced by a remote feeder."

And then we're going to change that. We're going to close the door. Close the door and working with our camera, same thing. Let the dog do what they're doing and when they go, "Oh okay." Then you're going to go back and reinforce them for just hanging out in that room and being relaxed.



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And when you've got a dog to this stage, remember we're growing this up to 20, 30 minutes. Now what we're going to do is we're going to introduce those hidden treasures. So, the hidden treasures, the stuffed [KONGs](#), the stuffed toys that they can roll them around. You can put them under things in that room that the dog's going to be in. And you're going to have your remote feeder.

So now what you're going to do when you're back behind the closed door, looking at your camera, instead of just rewarding the dog for relaxing, we're going to reward the dog for getting up and investigating the room.

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So, they get up, they might stretch, I'll click the remote feeder, they come back and get their cookie and they'll go, "Well that's great, but I thought I smelled something over here." And when they're playing with one of those balls that's dropping out cookies, hit the remote feeder. "Oh, well this is fun. But I'll get this, but I'm going to go back."

Why we're introducing these toys is because we want to get rid of the remote feeder. The idea of the remote feeder isn't a babysitter. We want a relaxed dog that we can leave in their fortress of calm. Because we've built up this fortress of calm.

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So, once you get to the place where you've reinforced the dog for stretching, now you probably have had that dog in that room with the door closed. You've built up to maybe an hour. It's time to take off the training wheels and just leave the house, right? You set that all up.

Now, what's probably going to happen is when the dog sees the mat, the remote feeder, and all of the toys that you've hidden around the room, they see you taking that into the room.

They're probably going to get excited because it means you're leaving. And instead of getting anxious about you leaving, they're like, "Oh yeah, the feeder's coming out. That means good things are going to happen!" Right?

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And for the first few times when you leave the house, you're going to leave it all out there. The remote feeder's going to be there, and all the stuffed KONGs and everything's in play. Ideally, you're going to do this in many different rooms. Now you've got a dog who's calm anywhere in your home.

And if you have a problem with your dog not being calm like in a car, do exactly the same protocol. But you have to include time in the car. Time in the car alone, time in the car if they're just anxious when you're driving, whatever it is, wherever the challenge. We're growing the calm behavior and just creating a castle for the dog to be calm in.

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Makes sense, right? It's crazy, right? Now, Nadine and Simone are doing phenomenal things, coaching people through this program. And I've asked them if they would consider doing one in English. By the way, their English is brilliant.

So, if you have interest in being coached by Nadine and Simone through the FRIDA Protocol, I'm going to [leave a link](#) where you can leave your name and email address and if there's enough interest, then they will create a program in English.



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I think it's brilliant, it works amazing. We're teaching dogs from a calm state forward. I mean, that's the way learning should happen for all dogs. So, if you have a puppy, do the FRIDA Protocol proactively. If you have an adult dog, hey, why not? It's just good fun dog training, right?

Jump on over to YouTube, leave me a comment, and while you're here please subscribe and be sure to join us for our live where we're celebrating podcast episode 200 here. We've got some amazing guests that are going to be joining me on the live.

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Kamal Fernandez from the UK. Amazing, gifted dog trainer over there. Laurie Williams, the canine diva. Emily Larlham from Kikopup will be joining us. As well as Matt Folsom from the Modern Malinois. And Simone and Nadine will be joining us among others! So, you're not going to want to miss that live.

Thank you for all your support. And from my team out to you, appreciate you. We'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Separation Anxiety Online Program in English:

Register your interest in having Nadine and Simone's Online Program for Separation Anxiety in English - <https://dogsthat.com/separation-anxiety/>

Dog Gear Mentioned for the FRIDA Protocol:

[West Paw Toppl Treat Toys](#)

[Snuffle Mat](#)

[Bowser Donut Dog Bed](#)

[Ex-Pen](#)

[PetGeek Remote Feeder](#)

[Treat & Train Remote Feeder](#)

[Ring Stick Up Cam](#)

[Kong Toys](#)

Resources:

[FRIDA Protocol for Separation Anxiety Online Program \(German\)](#)

[YouTube Playlist: Exercising Your Dog's Body and Mind: Tips and Games with Susan Garrett](#)

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

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

[Podcast Episode 157: Dog Body Language: Understanding Canine Communication Signals And Emotions](#)



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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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