

DOGS WITH ***BIG FEELINGS***

A collection of training insights
about the emotional life of dogs by
the instructors of FDSA!



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After a lifetime of affectionate regard for dogs and many years of close observation and reflection, I have reached the conclusion that dogs feel more than I do (I am not prepared to speak for other people). They feel more, and they feel more purely and more intensely.

-Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson

Whether your dog struggles with feelings of anxiety, fear, over-excitement, is highly sensitive or easily frustrated (or you are!), at FDSA we're all about embracing the emotional complexity of dog-handler teams and bringing out the best at both ends of the leash.

We hope you find something valuable in this selection of writing and resources from your favorite FDSA instructors!

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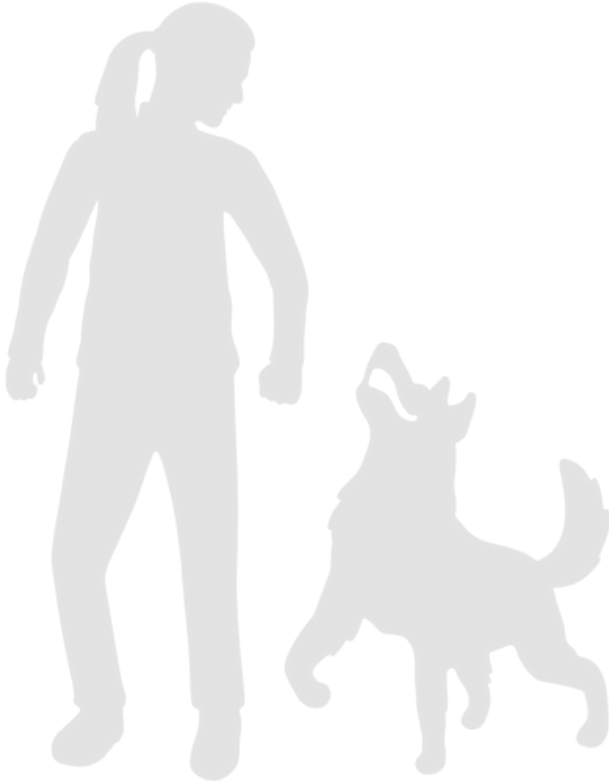
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DOGS WITH BIG FEELINGS

Dogs with Sensitive Souls



CHOICE IN DOG TRAINING

Sharon Carroll |

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Reducing choice can be a good thing!

For many years we have understood that choice and control are imperative to the welfare of all living organisms. However, once this phenomenon was discovered, it was assumed that if choice is good, then more choice would be even better!

Many human studies have proven this to be incorrect. Indeed, too much choice may lead to ambivalence, frustration, confusion, anxiety, stress, drained psychological energy and reduction in self-regulation. Although this seems counter-intuitive, the phenomenon can be observed in even the most basic of marketing experiments.

When researchers open a mini-shop offering over 20 flavors of a particular product, and then close and re-open offering less than 10 flavors, the shop with less choice will sell far more product overall. Having greater choice, does not result in improved decision making; rather, reducing choice can be seen to facilitate the process of decision making and, in many studies, has been linked to a reduction in associated stress.

Some of the reasons for this are quite specific to humans, as we are able to feel ongoing regret for a perceived poor choice, and we have the capacity to continue to compare our selection to all of the choices we didn't select.

However, there are also some underlying principles that can easily be applied to our dogs. If we offer only a very limited number of choices in a given

Dogs with Big Feelings | Limiting Choice

circumstance, then the decision process is less difficult, is likely to be made more quickly, with less frustration and/or ambivalence, and the "right" outcome is far more likely to be selected. We know this. We implement this in many of our training strategies. We set the dogs up for success. We limit the other options available (e.g., the item we want the dog to interact with is the only item in the training environment initially). Then of course in conjunction with this strategy we heavily reinforce the behavior we desire.

Limiting choice in training

Although most reinforcement-based trainers will advocate for dogs to have choice, they primarily are referring to a choice to participate or not, as opposed to suggesting that we provide the dog with unlimited choice in all circumstances. In fact, most training strategies are designed to limit choice, especially in the early training phase. This is not a bad thing. It reduces frustration for the dog, and achieves a "correct" choice more quickly, hence ensuring the highest rate of reinforcement for the dog. Sometimes this concept of strategically limiting choice, is not well-described to new trainers, who are left trying to offer the dog abundant choice in all circumstances, often resulting in a frustrated trainer and a frustrated dog.

Here are a few common examples of how we may limit choices when initially training an inexperienced dog:

- Have no other dogs in the immediate environment.
- Work in a sparse training area.
- Work in a small training area.
- Work indoors.
- Limit equipment to items we want the dog to interact with (e.g., platform, etc.)
- When outdoors, initially have a fenced area, or a leash on the dog.
- Ensure no food or toys are freely accessible in the environment (if the dog has not yet been trained to ignore these distractions).

Of course, the dog should always have the choice to participate or not, but beyond that, we initially work to provide a situation where other options are limited. When training a specific behavior, too much choice will not help even the most work-oriented dog to rapidly access the reinforcement we have available.

Once a specific behavior has been established, then we will often steadily increase the number of other potential choices available to the dog (e.g., work in a bigger and busier environment; work with free access to distractions such as food, toys, and/or other dogs). Many new trainers, however, only have the opportunity to observe other partnerships at this higher level of training. This can lead new trainers to not fully appreciate that the behaviors they are witnessing, were likely initially trained with less choices available.

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One of the training protocols that appears to give the most choice, is free shaping with an object (e.g., a box). Superficially free shaping appears to offer an abundance of choice, but if we look closer, we usually see a sparse, distraction-free environment, a conspicuous single object as the focal point of the session, other set-up strategies contributing to the likelihood of the wanted behavior occurring, and a dog with a big learning history that will heavily contribute to its understanding of the process. Yet even with all of this, we certainly do see dogs who would not choose free shaping as their preferred style of learning. Some dogs actively indicate that they would prefer more guidance to assist their decision making.

So, when training a dog, you can choose to limit your dog's choices or not, but if we look at the practices of almost all successful trainers, it indicates that limiting choice, but certainly not removing choice, is a highly effective training strategy. Watching the frustration levels of dog's who are given abundant choice, versus those offered limited choices, would also suggest that many dogs prefer this strategy also.

When is limiting choice not optional, but essential?

For dogs to successfully integrate in our society, we do place restrictions on their behavior. We require them not to harass unknown people or other animals, and we require them not to pose a safety risk to humans or other dogs. Of course, these rules are just imposed by humans; what we consider a "good" or "bad" choice, is not a reflection of anything other than our societal requirements. Many behaviors humans consider "bad", are in fact very logical, and in some cases appropriate, behaviors for the dog. It is for this reason, that we sometimes need to work with the dog to avoid them making choices that our society may consider "bad".

Some of the key times where limiting behavior is not optional, but essential, include when the dog may perform a behavior that poses a safety risk to others or themselves. For example:

- If the dog is potentially going to perform a behavior that society would consider a "bad" choice (e.g., harassing or attacking a human or another dog), then as the owner, we should limit choice.
- If the dog is escalating to an extremely high arousal level and is soon likely to lose the ability to make "good" choices, then as the owner, we should step in and limit choice.

How we limit the dog's choice will vary depending on the dog, and the circumstance. Ensuring dogs do not perform a behavior that is unacceptable to human society can be achieved through a variety of strategies. Some of these strategies are management oriented; that is, managing the situation to avoid the dog having the opportunity to make a "bad" choice. Whereas some strategies utilize training; over time, these strategies reduce the likelihood of the dog performing a behavior that would be considered a "bad" choice.

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Management strategies may include the use of crates, ex-pens, safety gates, separated areas and/or leashing, as well as assessing the environment and being aware of potential issues. I purposely have not listed muzzles here, as even though they may form part of an overall management plan, they are primarily aimed at stopping a bad outcome, as opposed to stopping a "bad" choice on the part of the dog.

Management protocols essentially rely on not placing a dog in a situation where they are likely to need to make a "bad" choice. For example:

- Don't have dogs with a history of dog aggression in free contact with other unknown dogs – (except when actively participating in a controlled behavior modification session).

Don't allow unknown people to be within reach of a dog that has demonstrated human-directed aggression – (except when actively participating in a controlled behavior modification session).

Owners should feel comfortable using management either as a temporary (but effective) strategy whilst further training is being established, or as an ongoing protocol to avoid the risks associated with repeated "bad" choices. Placing the dog behind a safety gate, in a crate, or in another room is an appropriate strategy for dogs that are likely to perform "inappropriate" behaviors (threat displays, aggression, redirected aggression, or even just jumping on people) when visitors are present. This type of separation is equally effective for dogs who may make "bad" choices



Photo: Using a Safety Gate

due to fear, anxiety, owner guarding traits, property guarding traits, or over-excitement. One of the key features when employing management strategies, is that it is not necessary to determine the emotion or motivation driving the behavior, whereas this information is often essential when selecting an appropriate behavior-modifying training strategy.

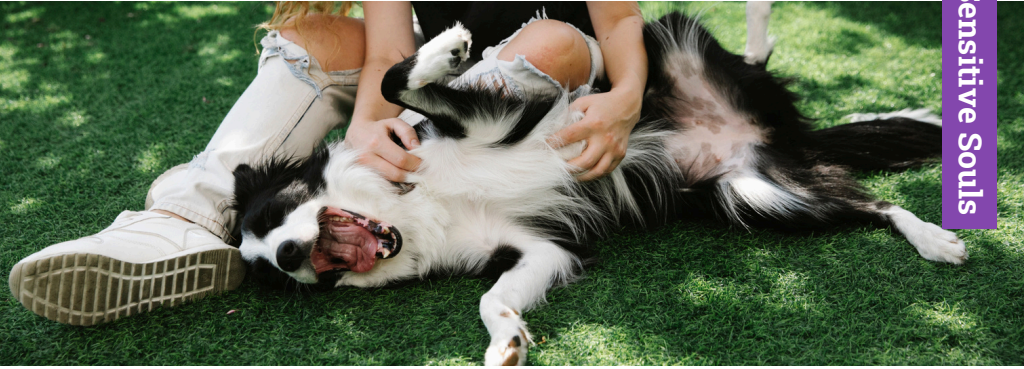
Another area that falls under the banner of preventing dogs from needing to make a "bad" choice, is informing veterinarians, groomers, kennels, doggie day-care, walkers, etc., if the dog is fearful or may show aggression. Medications for these situations should also be discussed with a veterinarian, where appropriate. Beyond management we may also choose to undertake training to increase the likelihood that the dog is going to make "good" choices. These training strategies will vary depending on the dog and the circumstance but will likely broadly fall into one of the following categories:

Dogs with Big Feelings | Limiting Choice

- Impulse control - Many dogs struggle with impulsivity, especially when stimulated by movement and/or noise. Training can be undertaken to directly address impulse control issues. In addition, we can strategically reinforce an incompatible behavior; this incompatible behavior can then ultimately be cued by the stimulus.
- Fear / anxiety - Some dogs perform "bad" choices due to fear or anxiety. Training with these dogs typically includes the use of desensitization / counter-conditioning protocols, together with free choice for escape from the stimulus if the dog desires that outlet.
- Owner or property guarding - Some dogs perform threat behaviors and aggressive behaviors in certain circumstances due to a genetic predisposition to perform that behavior (breed-specific traits). These dogs are not reacting to fear, and hence can often be effectively managed by directly training and reinforcing a more "appropriate" behavior in the presence of the stimulus.

TRAINING SENSITIVE DOGS

Helene Lawler | www.helenelawlercoaching.ca



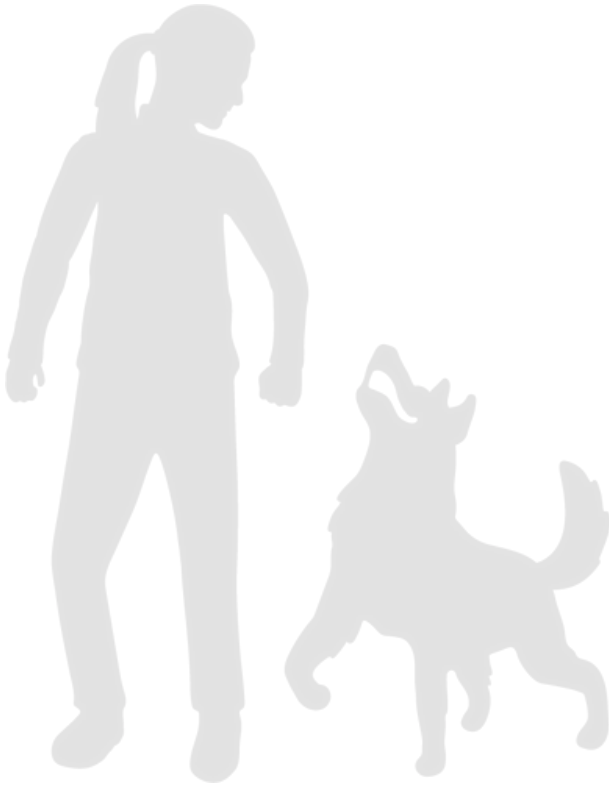
Have a dog that shuts down or checks out during training? Helene shares why this is overarousal, not low arousal as many handlers think — plus her 5 part approach to training sensitive dogs!



[Listen to the podcast episode!](#)

DOGS WITH BIG FEELINGS

Dogs with Big Joy



THE ULTIMATE GOAL

A HAPPY JOYFUL DOG IN COMPETITION

Petra Ford | www.petrasdogresourcecenter.com



My ultimate goal when trialing is to have the same dog in the ring that I have in training. A dog that is happy and joyful and having a blast.

I think we all want that. And we train really, really hard for a very, very long time to get that.

And then we compete and don't get it. And we are very disappointed and frustrated. And to be honest, a little confused. I mean, what the heck happened?? We worked soooo hard!! We made everything sooo much fun!! And when we train at home, the dog is sooo happy!! We start to question whether our dog is cut out for this. Whether the dog can handle the "stress" of the ring. Maybe this just isn't our sport.

The problem is our expectations. We need to face a truth that many people don't talk about.

Competing is hard. It's stressful. The dog will struggle.

That's a fact. That's reality. Very few dogs will think it's fun. Maybe they will enjoy some pieces. But not all. Why?

Well. There are a whole host of reasons. We are asking them to ignore every single thing that's natural to them and keeps them safe. Don't sniff, don't look, don't listen to the environment... The dog will be surrounded by novel and unpredictable distractions... people, dogs, food, environmental distractions...

I've shown in a ring after more than one dog peed in it.... you name it, I've seen it.

Dogs with Big Feelings | The Ultimate Goal

And after decades of competing, I still encounter completely unique distractions. Which means it's impossible to prepare my dog for every single eventuality. I must teach a concept. And concepts are incredibly hard for dogs to learn. The dog will be under pressure. Not only can they not move away from it, they need to move INTO it. That's NOT natural... or comfortable... not at all.

The dog must be touched by a judge. Umm, just think about how you would feel. Would you think that was fun?

Now, don't get me wrong. With incredibly good training the dog can handle the rigors of the ring. The dog can be fairly happy. Ok, maybe more than fairly happy.

But don't be fooled. It's still hard. Really hard.



Understanding how hard trialing is for your dog

The dog is working long periods without any information. People often say "the dog only works for food." I don't believe that. I think the food (or toy) is part of the cue system.

Our dogs don't understand "the ring" or what silly goals we are trying to achieve. They are looking for context and cues. That's it.

Reinforcers are part of the context... and part of the cue system. Take those away and the dog is confused. The picture is completely different. Now what??

Dogs with Big Feelings | The Ultimate Goal

They must learn to work for long periods before they get a reinforcer. They must learn that "no information" means you are correct! Keep going and the jackpot will come. And that must be taught carefully and mindfully. And maintained. For the dog's entire career. And yes, the hard truth is that the dogs must learn to push through when things get challenging. If they haven't been taught to do that, you haven't prepared the dog. And that's not fair.

When dogs struggle in the ring, it means they truly don't understand all those pieces.

And even when they do, many dogs will still find it challenging. Because it's just not natural. Teaching dogs the exercises is the easy part. Preparing them for the ring, now that's incredibly challenging. And a career long process. I think people would be less discouraged and frustrated and disappointed if they had more realistic expectations.

If your dog is struggling in the ring, you are not a failure. There isn't a flaw in your relationship. There are holes in your training. Find them, fix them. The performance will improve.

Does this mean you shouldn't work towards a happy, joyful dog in the ring? No. Absolutely not. We should. Always. But does it mean that one day it will just be easy for your dog? No, it won't. That's reality. Does it mean your dog is not cut out for the sport? No. It doesn't. It just means you have to keep working.

I hate when my dogs struggle in the ring. I want them to be relaxed and happy. It's why I'm obsessed with every tiny aspect of training. Why I'm always learning and reading and watching and thinking and analyzing.

But I'm also realistic. I truly understand how hard it is for the dog. I truly understand that every single trial is unique and offers different challenges. I understand that regardless of what I do, the dog will, at some point, struggle. And that's part of trialing. I understand that some dogs are better at pushing through than others. But I also know that even a super wimpy dog can become more confident and can learn to handle challenges in the ring.

Yes, it takes a lot of work. But it's possible.

The reason I'm still training and competing is because it's not easy. My goal is elusive. There are times I get oh so close... and then it slips away. But I love challenges. So I keep at it.

You must love the training process. Because that's what you spend the majority of your time doing. Training. Not trialing. Trialing is just a benchmark that tells you how close you are to achieving your goal. But remember, your goal must be realistic. If it's not, you will be disappointed, again and again. And that's not fun. I think if more people truly understood, from the dog's perspective, what we were asking, they would not get so frustrated. If think if more people.

Dogs with Big Feelings | The Ultimate Goal

understood that trialing is going to be hard for your dog, they would have more realistic expectations. And if our expectations are realistic, we will be less frustrated and disappointed. We will understand that our dogs are doing the very best they can with the training they have at that moment. And when we come home all we can do is analyze what went well and what didn't. Then keep training and do the very best we can, with our current skill level, to get a bit closer to the ultimate goal.

PLAY FOR EVERYONE

Denise Fenzi | www.denisefenzi.com



I think playing with dogs is a really good idea. When people play with their dogs, they like them better. They smile more. Their dogs start to look towards them more easily and frequently.

In short – it's just nice. It's nice for people and it's nice for dogs.

So. How does one play with a dog?

Here's a video example of play with Brito. In this video, I am playing with food, toys and just myself. I am throwing training into the mix as well, because my long term goal with training is always to make it as blended with play as possible.

Brito - Routine Training

If you incorporate play into your training sessions, start small. For homework, find one form of personal play that your dog enjoys (belly rub? Chasing your hand?), one form of toy play that works (tug of war? fetch? Chew toy while mom cheers you on?) and one form of food play (toss the treat? Chase the mommy with the treat? Jump for the treat?).

If you need more play ideas, look for the [FDSA Self-Study class, FE101: Relationship Building Through Play.](#)

After a few weeks, ask your yourself how you feel when you play with your dog. I bet you'll smile when you think about it.

And people who smile when they talk about their dogs love their dogs more and treat them better. That's what I want to see!

THE HAPPY PLACE IS REAL!

Julie Daniels | www.koolkidsagility.com



Teaching Your Dog To Love Anywhere You May Train

This article is a mini lecture taken from Julie's Cookie Jar Games class.

Classical conditioning affects our minds and our bodies, and the way we perceive the world around us. It affects basic functions like heart rate and blood pressure, feelings, and yes, salivation.

All at the level of the autonomic systems of the body.

Classical conditioning does not need your permission. It is ongoing whether you know it or not, and whether you like it or not.

Creating Happy Places Where You Train

The saying is that Pavlov is always in the room. I think we should remember that Pavlov got there first.

Because classical conditioning is always in play during your training sessions, you are better off knowing what you are trying to accomplish and why. Then, above all, notice the effect you are having as you train!

Nothing is more important than your dog feeling happy to be working with you. Those feelings lead to confidence and optimism about going to new places with you.

Each time your dog walks into a space with you they have an immediate feeling about the place itself. That feeling sets the tone for the experience they expect

Dogs with Big Feelings | The Happy Place

to have in that space. Optimism about a new place comes from an aggregate level of positivity that you have built for them in all the spaces you have trained. The more you create Happy Places in all your training spaces, the more your dog will feel confident and successful as they enter the next space with you — this begins at home. You are the common denominator, and you have the power to create Happy Places for your dog.



Using the Cookie Jar to Make Anywhere A Happy Place

We go in-depth on this topic in Cookie Jar Games.

How you set up each session of your training in this class is important. Each time you establish operations to train, every time you and your dog load your Cookie Jar and prepare to play one of our games, you are adding to your dog's aggregate level of happiness for the work we are doing here. Your dog's feelings about his Cookie Jar are under your power as his trainer!

Every session is an investment for the next time. And those feelings will be quickly triggered each time you take your Cookie Jar on the road. The Cookie Jar becomes a cue for feeling happy, and you get to take that powerful tool into new places once you have done your homework with it at home. Home can be full of Happy Place training spaces. You associate the Cookie Jar with those good feelings about training spaces at home, and then the Cookie Jar can trigger that same feeling when you take it elsewhere.

What associations do you want your dog to make with the Cookie Jar? You are already doing very well with that, no doubt. I know that your training spaces at home are among your dog's favorite places. You have a good solid foundation of happy, non-stressed fun with the Cookie Jar. So now you have a strong predictor of fun that you can carry from place to place.

Over the course of this class, we take that Cookie Jar to many different places. The positive power you generate with it is very important because those feelings will transfer. The happy feelings you have built for your dog will help you turn everywhere you do Cookie Jar work into a Happy Place. It is your job to keep that sentiment strong! It is much more important than any particular skill!

What is a Happy Place?

Happy Place is real, and Happy Place means more than "cookie place." For both you and your dog, Happy Place means a place of personal power, a place of win/win choices, a place where dog and handler do fabulous fun work together as a team. How you and your dog feel about the Cookie Jar away from home will have a LOT to do with how your dog feels about all the places you have trained them at home.

Be sure to set about creating exactly the emotional state you want. That little Cookie Jar is going to be one of your best training tools ever! Once you've done a great job of that at home in your training spaces, we move your training spaces around each time you are ready to bring a new game out and about. That allows your Cookie Jar to cue the HAPPY PLACE mentality in new places! Your dog's Cookie Jar will be a powerful part of their positive Conditioned Emotional Response to training, wherever you go. Being in love with the Cookie Jar is a good thing, especially when you want to cue confidence and optimism in new places.

In all of your training spaces at home, make sure your dog feels delighted to realize that he is going to play a Cookie Jar game. Every training space needs to be a Happy Place. In this class we build concepts and skills with our Cookie Jar as a common denominator. Then we get to take it on the road and let the Cookie Jar cue Happy Place feelings wherever we want to train.

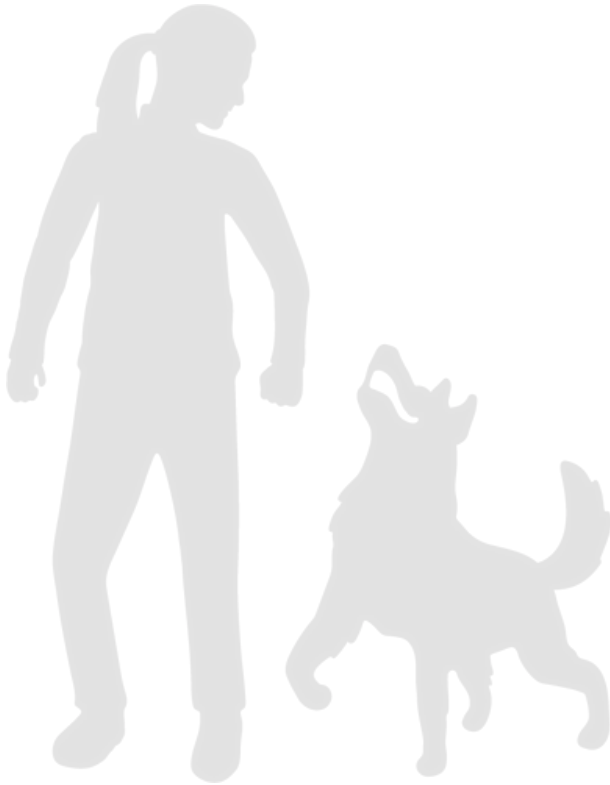
The Happy Place is real, and Happy Place feelings are important!



Cookie Jar Game in action!

DOGS WITH BIG FEELINGS

Dogs with Big Reactions



LOCATION SPECIFIC MARKERS

FOR REACTIVE INTEGRATION

Karen Deeds | www.deedscanineconnection.com



Reinforcement Strategies: Food

This article is a mini lecture taken from Karen's Reactive Integration class.

Up to now, we have really been focusing on helping your dog lower their 'baseline'. This is part of my plan to help your dog build some resiliency by providing them time to decompress, to feel safe regarding not being threatened by their triggers, increasing their mental and physical wellbeing, and giving them agency in their environment.

Our next steps to building some resiliency is to create more predictability. This can come from a variety of sources, and the first one we are going to address is the way we train them! Obviously, my philosophy and the one here at FDSA is to embrace positive reinforcement!

One of the concepts coming from the sport dog world has been that of the "Multiple Marker System" or "Location Specific Markers". I was first introduced to them when my husband was training for Mondio Ring, which is a bite sport, and doing so without the use of aversives or corrections. From there, I started using it with my potential sport dog puppy, and later with my border collie rescue that had some VERY big feelings!

It wasn't until I began working with a client's dog, a Cattle dog that had some serious behavior issues, that I realized how impactful they could be for non-sporting dogs as well. This dog had been training with another positive reinforcement training facility and had been utilizing only a clicker for a marker cue. Something that I had been doing with most of my students up till then!

Dogs with Big Feelings | Location Specific Markers

The first time I pushed the metal on the box clicker, this dog started frantically looking around for where to expect the food. Was he supposed to come get it from my hand? Was I going to toss it? Was I going to bring it to him? So, I put the clicker down and implemented the same communication system I had for my high energy sport dog. The difference was profound, and I never looked back and have been using them with all my clients since then.

Creating predictability and CLARITY in your communication is important. We can create a way that we can communicate to your dog that reinforcement is coming.

This is a process to:

1. Teach the dog that a word means to eat in a specifically designated place (so learning takes place and your words matter!)
2. To use it as a gauge to how the dog 'feels' – can they eat? – can they listen to a 'cue' about where to eat? Or are they too aroused, fixated, scared, or stressed? All which will affect your dog's ability to 'listen'.
3. To create a bridge between desired behavior and food.
4. To create a bridge to/connection with a 'trigger' and the food to condition emotional state.
5. To manipulate the arousal state. We can calm them down (scatter or good), speed them up (toss) or keep them neutral (clicker/yip)
6. To take advantage of the concept of 'strategic placement of reinforcement' by teaching markers that influence movement or position of the dog.
7. To make the trainer a more THOUGHTFUL trainer and to be more observant and aware of their dog.
8. To influence the dogs natural or influenced tendency.

Countering Tendency

Training is about 'tendency'. Either you are trying to Create a new tendency, Change one you don't like, or Continue one you do like, I find that the clarity and placement of reinforcement is a huge help in this concept.

Considering the different temperaments and emotional states of dogs I work with; I have found it helpful to have a variety of marker cues. These are the four we will start with. We will add more as we go through the course.

Baseline – Food delivered from the hand that is neither over arousing, nor meant to be calming.

Movement – Food delivered in a way that engages the dogs' prey drive.

Multiple – Food delivered in a way to engage a bit of the dogs seeking system by requiring sniffing.

Dogs with Big Feelings | Location Specific Markers

Room Service/Slow Cookie – Food delivered directly to the mouth with expectations that the dog remains in position.

Before you practice on your dog, practice by yourself!!! Here is a video of me teaching three of the main marker cues. Remember you can use a verbal marker (I use “Yip” or “Yes”) instead of the clicker:

Marker cue mechanics

And here’s a demo of all four of the basic marker cues...

All 4 Marker Cues

REACTIVITY

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Barbara Lloyd | www.dogsden.ca



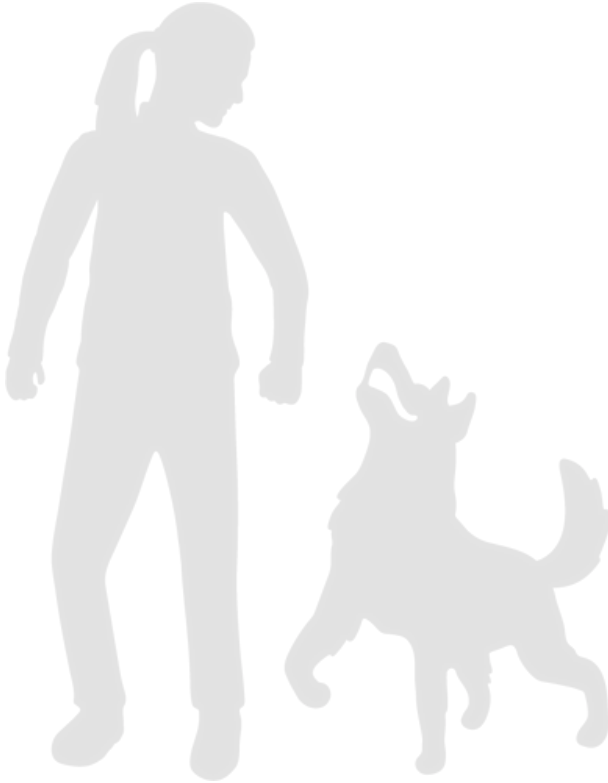
Enjoy this full-length webinar presentation all about Barbara's approach to reactivity, including video demos!



Reactivity Presentation

DOGS WITH BIG FEELINGS

Dogs with Big Anxiety



HOW TEACHING ANXIOUS DOGS

WHAT TO DO CAN HELP THEM FEEL LESS ANXIOUS

Irith Trietsch Bloom | www.thesophisticateddog.com



Is your dog anxious? In my position as a professional trainer, I see a lot of anxious behavior: anxious behavior in dogs, anxious behavior in cats... even anxious behavior in humans whose pets are making them anxious! The exact behavior varies, but the underlying issues are often similar. Our pets lives can be stressful, and that stress can come out in funny ways.

Reducing anxious behavior

There are two main methods for reducing anxious behavior in dogs and other pets. One is to change the animal's emotional response, so there is less stress to begin with. For example, you might give a dog a treat every time he sees a scooter, which helps the dog learn that maybe scooters aren't so bad. The other method — which in some ways is even more powerful — is to give the pet better behavioral tools for dealing with the anxiety-producing situation.

What I mean by “behavioral tools” is acceptable behavioral alternatives— behaviors that we humans can live with, and which also help the dog (or other pet) feel safer and more in-control. When you teach animals what to do (rather than working on punishing problem behavior), you give them something to focus on instead of the stress. And that can lead to good results even in cases where the underlying stress isn't going away.

Why don't we do it in the road?

Here's a human example for you, from my own life. Recently, there's been a construction project going on in my neighborhood. I'm not entirely sure what they're working on (which adds to the stress), but the project is snarling traffic in the area, and they've put down big metal plates that make me a bit nuts. Each of these metal plates is massive and has ridges every four inches or so. The ridges

are raised, so when you drive over the plates, the steering wheel rattles in your hand, and your tires make what to me—a trained musician—is a really awful noise. A few weeks ago, I realized I was stressed out every time I approached the area, because I knew I was going to have to deal with that awful rattle.

So I put my animal trainer hat on. Avoiding the area was not a good option—it's a route I take a lot—so I started to think about what I could do instead of focusing on the rattle. After some thought, I decided I would act silly and make a rattling noise along with the car every time I drove across the metal plates. It gave me something to think about other than the vibrating steering wheel, and it also covered up the rattling sound if I did it loud enough.

The result? I started to feel a little better driving there. I still don't love the metal plates, but my level of stress is tolerable. I know what to do when I drive across the plates, and before I know it, the plates are behind me. Making the noise is kind of fun, too. My dread of the area is more or less gone (though I'll still be happier when the road is back to normal).

You have a point here, right?

Yes, I promise I have a point. And here it is: Imagine you have a dog who is uncomfortable around other dogs. Every time she sees a dog on a walk, it makes her very anxious. She gets so anxious, in fact, that she starts to bark and lunge. So you teach her a simple behavior pattern:

When you (my dog) see another dog, I will say your name. When you look at me in response to your name, you will get a treat. Or if you choose to look at me before I say your name, you can get a treat for that too. Now let's repeat that, while continuing to walk on. If you need me to, I will do this with you ten times in a row!

It's as if we're saying "I'm here to help you in your time of need."

What are you teaching your dog when you do this? You're teaching her that (A) when she sees other dogs, treats appear. This helps her learn to feel less stressed about the sight of other dogs. You are also teaching her that (B) when she sees other dogs, she can focus on checking in with you rather than barking and lunging at the other dog.

I don't know if I can ever make a dog who is anxious about other dogs feel completely safe and comfortable around other dogs (sometime trauma is permanent). What I do know is that I can teach her something to do in that situation, so that she doesn't have to focus on her traumatized feelings. And I know that as she gets good at the alternative behavior, the problem behavior will lessen or even disappear.

Growing Up FDSA | Teaching Anxious Dogs

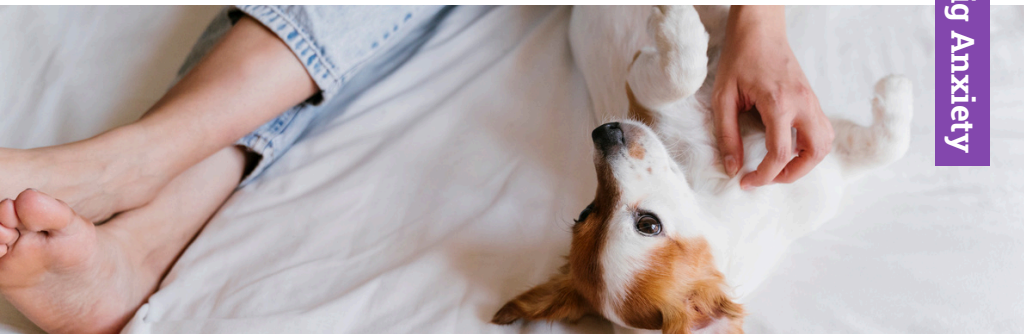
The best results come from focusing on teaching behavior you like

Focusing on what you want your pet TO DO, rather than what behavior you want to stop, may seem like a small thing, but the impact of it can be huge. Next time your pet does something you find distressing, stop and ask yourself this question: What could my pet do in this situation that would make things easier for both of us? The answer is your next training goal!

SOCIAL PLAY

FOR BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Amy Cook, PhD | www.playwaydogs.com



I've come a long way as a trainer. It's been quite an evolution.

I'd like to think we all do that, though I'm aware that there have to be trainers that train today just as they did when they started. With all the changes in dog training over just the last two or three decades, it's almost hard to imagine.

Like many, I started on the traditional route, using leashes and collars as instructional tools and believing praise was adequate motivation for the complex and often difficult tasks and skills we require of dogs. But there was a revolution in dog training, and in the late 90's, I started learning about clicker training, thinking more scientifically about behavior problems and less anthropomorphically (no more pack theory!), and using food liberally to both explain what I wanted and to motivate dogs to want to do those things.

I adopted a dog with severe anxiety around that time and through working with her, and working with all the many trainers I sought out to help me better my skills, I eventually specialized in fearful, reactive, and stressed out dogs. Food became my tool of choice, and "threshold" was now something I understood as a big part of a program's success. You need to keep a dog under threshold in order to do your rehab work, and you need to help the dog equate the thing he fears with the thing you are now providing: the food. The tighter the association, the more the dog will come to see that the thing he fears is really just a predictor of food, and thus isn't so bad after all. I learned to be liberal with food, and to time its production after the appearance of the trigger, so that dogs learned that triggers predict food. All well and good.

Except for when it wasn't.

Working with a Fearful Dog

Fear is tough to work with, and threshold is hard to honor in changing conditions. It's also very hard to measure! What counts as under threshold? That the dog will eat? That was what I was taught initially. If he can eat, you can make the association, and you can get emotional — and thus behavioral — change.

But is that a good enough definition? It was workable, but to me at the time, it was lacking. Too many dogs can eat while tense and worried.

Fear is tough to work with. It spreads easily from trigger to trigger, and can be very resistant to change. An animal who feels fear (or any of its analogs, for the sake of discussion), is so often physically tense, cognitively busy, and emotionally pressured. It makes learning very difficult, and is of course the very reason we monitor threshold.



But still, learning the lessons that the food is trying to bring while struggling to concentrate, physically loosen up, and be in a positive emotional space is challenging. If you've been training for any time at all you'll know that lots of dogs can eat and attend to you pretty well, and yet still be tense and concerned about a trigger in their environment, even one very far away. It can make threshold hard to honor, and definitions fuzzy.

I wanted something more.

I wanted something that could better help me read a dog's internal state and get better odds on my guess of what they're thinking and feeling. I wanted something that couldn't be used at all if the dog wasn't in a good emotional place for therapy, because they wouldn't partake of it with you. No more gray areas! I wanted something that physically relaxes dogs, to help them let go of the tension that can keep fear alive. I wanted something that brought emotions alive in them that were incompatible with fear.

I was unconvinced that eating and feeling fearful were adequately incompatible.

Fighting Fear with Play: The Play Way

Enter social play. I will have a lot to say about play as time goes on, but for now I'll just make the distinction for you that social play is not what we're doing when we play fetch and tug with our dogs. That may be a form of play (though I'm going to argue later that it's not — it's just a really enjoyable activity), but it's not sufficiently different from food for a dog for this specific rehabilitative purpose.

While active toy play may reduce physical tension, it may also just redirect it for a duration... only to have that tension return once the game is stopped. It also doesn't reliably disappear when stress comes into the picture! Too many dogs can chase balls and tug with abandon and still be very concerned about a trigger in their environment—which can make it difficult to tell how they're feeling.

Social play is what you're doing when you're goofing around together, being affectionate and silly.



Social play is when you're laughing together, lolling, teasing and just enjoying interacting with each other, no toy or food or "reward" needed. Social play is the expression of the enjoyment of your social relationship.

Social play is what most of us just naturally do with puppies, well before we think of pulling out a cookie and rewarding them. Social play is personal connection, delight in each other, and laughter.

And here's the thing about play that hits that social note: it disappears when stress creeps in, even a little bit. Laughing and silliness are the first things to go when you start to have a concern, and thus they make a great indicator that something has changed.

Social play is also very relaxing, as by design it involves loose bodies and goofy play moves. Tension makes it go away, or at least shift. Social play is also a really enjoyable activity, bringing up many positive emotions, ones that are incompatible with stress and fear.

If you have play, truly social, silly, loose play, then you stand a great chance of being able to say that fear is far away.

The Magic of Play

I'm not in any way saying that food and tug and fetch don't have their place in rehabilitation and I still use them routinely, especially when the dog needs a lot of support in order to be successful, or when conditions change and play disappears, and I can't effectively leave the situation. But I've been using social play now for about 4 years in my new rehabilitation program for dogs — called The Play Way — and the changes I see are remarkable.

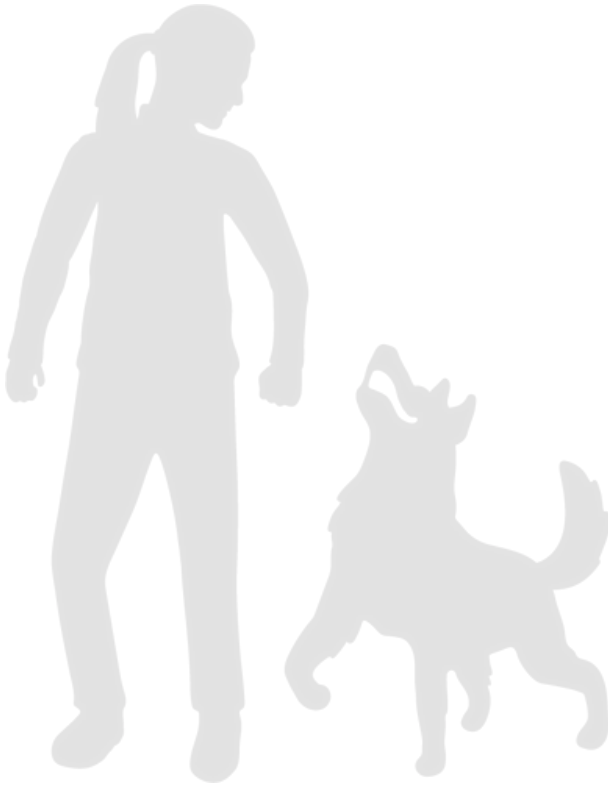
Play really is magic, and I feel I'm only just beginning to identify all the ways it has been helping my students.

Of course, not all dogs, especially ones that are stressed and have some fears to contend with, really know how to get into that social play space with us. And not all people (ahem, most?) really know how to teach it to a novice dog, or even really do it at all with experienced dogs! It's not something we're encouraged to do with dogs, favoring toys instead when we "play," and we can often be put off it by the style they bring to the table at first (mouthiness, anyone?).

All of these things are surmountable. Some dogs find more of a play spirit than others do, and some people are themselves pretty serious and unused to relating socially to animals (and people!) this way, but it's definitely possible to learn how. And once you have this social play relationship established, there's so much you can do with it to help a dog learn to reframe their fears and let go of their stresses.

DOGS WITH BIG FEELINGS

Dogs with Big Excitement



OVERAROUSAL

Denise Fenzi | www.denisefenzi.com



Is your high drive dog always "on" - seemingly unable to relax and scanning for triggers to focus their arousal? Read on!

Arousal

When dog trainers talk about arousal in dogs, they're talking about the emotional experience of being in a heightened state of awareness.

Working dogs are notoriously easy to arouse. That makes sense! We want dogs that are easy to motivate, engage, reinforce, and make aware of their environment as required.

It doesn't matter if your dog is a terrier, a hunting dog, or a police canine; a degree of appropriate arousal and awareness of the environment is critical in a working dog.

While arousal is good within work and when combined with solid drives, it can also cause headaches for both the dog and the handler. For starters, some dogs link arousal with aggression and low frustration tolerance - these dogs are labeled "reactive", "hyper greeters" "out of control" or they may redirect their frustration back on their handlers. Some highly aroused dogs are unable to relax when arousal is not useful; they get stuck in arousal and are a misery to live with. Arousal can also link to anxiety, which means the dog struggles to exist comfortably within their own skin. One description of some working dogs in perpetual high arousal is "arousal looking for a trigger" rather than triggers in the environment sparking the arousal.

You might find that you cannot walk your easily aroused dog down the street without your dog targeting everything that moves, and if they are inclined towards using their nose, like spaniels, the same thing happens when they become aware of a scent. They become stuck! Fascinated! And - intense. Energetic. Unable to hear the handler and hyper-focused on whatever trigger has captivated them.

Owners of these dogs often exercise or train them excessively in an effort to satisfy their "drive." And it works! Temporarily anyway, because activity makes the dog happy by providing a focal point for their arousal. Add to that a working dog's love of a solid adrenaline rush and no wonder these dogs are workaholics. But long term, it's exhausting for the handler and doesn't really solve the problem. The dog doesn't require more training or exercise; the dog needs to learn to calm down when appropriate.

When arousal is attached to a trigger that we control, we call it drive. But when arousal is generic to the environment, it starts to look a lot like frantic behavior. The reality is that many easily aroused dogs, if not provided with an appropriate trigger, arouse on the entire world. "Chill" and take in the sights is not part of their vocabulary. Ever.

It's useless to think in terms of good and bad. Instead, think in terms of usable arousal, appropriate triggers, and developing techniques that allow the dog to calm down. Sometimes we have to teach our dogs how to modulate their arousal.

The goal is not to "take the dog out of the dog". The goal is to learn to live with your dog's temperament, provide appropriate outlets for that arousal and energy and give your dog the tools they need to relax (or escalate) their arousal as appropriate.

5 WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR DOG'S AROUSAL

Nicole Wiebusch | www.goldenpawtraining.com



Learning to reduce your dog's arousal levels will make training much easier. An over-aroused dog cannot think clearly, which makes learning difficult.

Many behavior problems are caused by a dog that is overaroused. Lowering arousal levels can improve reactivity, jumping on people, and barking/whining in frustration. Let's discuss some games you can teach your dog to help reduce arousal!

Snuffle Mats

When a dog sniffs for food, licks, and chews, their brain releases chemicals that help lower arousal. For this reason, some of the most effective lowering-arousal tricks include using food. Searching for food is calming and enriching for the dog.

Snuffle mats are a great way for a dog to search for food. The dog is required to actively work to find food by rummaging around in a mat with fleece on it. When the mat is stuffed, the food works its way down so the dog has to work to get it out.

Here's an example of a dog using a snuffle mat.



Snuffle Mat Video

Scatter

Scatter is a favorite of mine because you only need a handful of food. Scatter involves taking 4-6 pieces of food and calmly placing them on the ground. The dog will sniff around to find all of the food. Scatter does a great job reducing arousal as the dog looks for food. Start by saying "scatter" then placing food on the ground, allowing the dog to find it all.

Station

I love stations and use them all of the time. A station is a place (often a raised dog cot or bed) where the dog can be sent to hang out until released. From the beginning of the training, the dog is encouraged to relax on the station. For this reason, they tend to be a calming behavior for dogs.



Here's a video of my two goldens relaxing on a station while I work on some stuff.



Relaxed Downs on Station

Chin Rest

Chin rests are another great tool for lowering arousal. They encourage the dog to be still and thoughtful. To teach a chin rest, you can start with a nose touch. Start to change the angle of your hand to work toward the dog's chin targeting your hand, then add duration. Keep praise and rewards calm during this process.

Here I'm working on going from a nose touch to a chin rest:



Teaching Chin Rest

And in this video, I'm adding some duration.



Chin With Distractions

Relaxed Down

After I have a good station behavior, I like to teach a relaxed down. This is essentially a down stay in which I ignore my dog and encourage the dog to relax. Because I want the dog to relax and not be working for food, once my dog understands the stay, I stop rewarded during the down. I don't want my dog to expect food while they are in the stay. A dog who expects food will be "working" to get the food by staring at me, offering behaviors like hip switching or sighs.



Here's an example of Excel doing a relaxed down at a dog show, which I do often so he can look around and acclimate to the environment.

Down Stay at Dog Show

All of these games are great ones for helping your dog to reduce arousal. Remember to be calm when teaching these as you want your dog to have that same frame of mind. You'll want to use lower-value treats and soft soothing praise. I hope you enjoy these tricks to reduce your dog's arousal!

TEACHING POLITE GREETINGS

Erin Lynes | www.eromit.com



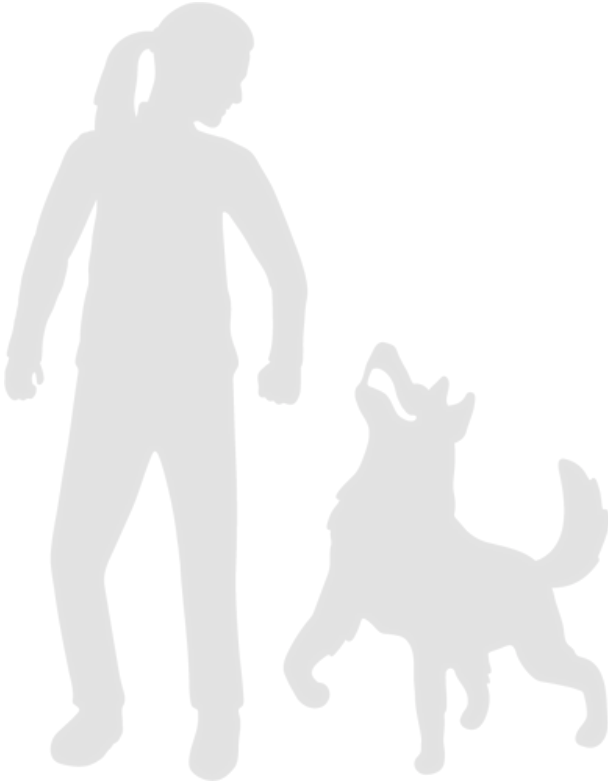
Have a dog who is a bit TOO enthusiastic about saying hello? In this Fenzi Dog Sports Podcast episode Erin Lynes talks about what you can do.



[Listen to the podcast episode!](#)

DOGS WITH BIG FEELINGS

Dogs with Big Resilience



RESILIENCE

Bronagh Daly | www.fivebyfivecanine.com



Originally posted on Bronagh's blog January, 2020.

nor-mal

adjective

Conforming to a standard; usual, typical, or expected.

In our most difficult months, weeks, days, hours, I would sometimes think about how things might've been different for Oz and I. If we had been dealt a different deck of cards, if things were easier for my big feelings boy, where we might be now.

It's pointless, because we are where we are—it wasn't meant to be, our journey wasn't meant to be as smooth as I had once expected it would be. And I am 100% happy about it. I wouldn't change our journey, everything we have learned, everything Oz has taught me, for anything. But it doesn't stop my brain from wondering....wondering what it would've been like if he had been what one might consider "normal."

But as I contemplate the definition of normal and as our hard work pays off, I have realized (with the assistance of a certain brilliant human & the best boy on the planet) that despite the appearance of "normal" that we have achieved, we have something much more important.

We have resilience.

re-sil-i-ence

noun

The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.

We have the ability for life to throw us something for which I'm not sure we're ready, and work right through it, presenting as if it had never been difficult for us at all. And while we're not "there" yet, wherever that is, we're taking stepping stones I never knew we could take. We're making visible progress.

That isn't to say that we don't still have small meltdowns, that things still aren't difficult for us, but that those meltdowns, those difficulties, can stand alone. They don't have to bleed into anything that might happen days, hours, or often even minutes later. No longer does someone doing something thoughtless ruin our whole day. We can take each separate event as just that: separate. We can RECOVER. And we can enjoy. We can appreciate those once stressful, unpredictable walks through the streets of Brooklyn. We can take delight in a hike where we unexpectedly run into three ATVs and a dirt bike (and even wag our tail at them). We can continue to smile in a seminar where a dog unexpectedly enters the ring off-leash before we're done with our turn. We can revel in things I once never thought possible.

And through Oz's (sometimes just plain amazing) resilience, Oz has taught me to have my own.

We can go out into the world and bask in it together. We can continue to expand our world instead of worrying about what might happen—because there will always be that person who lets their off-leash dog charge you in an NYC park or that driver that tailgates you in a snowstorm—there will always be that person doing something stupid wherever you go. So instead of getting upset, instead of waiting for that person to do that stupid thing, instead of wondering what caused that rare out of the blue meltdown, we take a breath and move on. We don't let it ruin the rest of our day.

It takes practice, it takes patience, but if Oz can face what used to seem like indomitable triggers with a smile on his face, I can too. Together, we can learn to trust that his resilience is strong, that we won't know what we can face unless we try.

And one thing I do know: life will never be simple on our journey. (And what's the fun in simple anyway?) But when we trust the resilience we have built—there's no telling where the journey might take us.

So take a breath and join us. Trust your resilience and see where it takes you.

Need more help with your dog's big feelings at home or out in the world? Be sure to check out current classes in FDSA's School of Behavior!

FDSA Class Schedule