

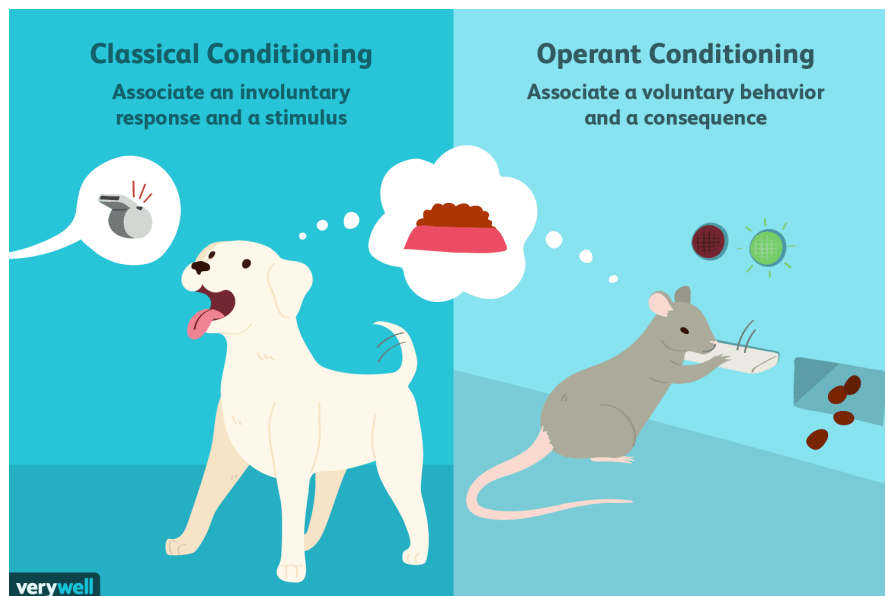
Train the Trainer: “Positive De-escalation”

Using Alternative Training Methods

Part 1 (Theory) by Anja Junkers

1. The “new” science behind dog training

The science upon which these new techniques are based is not exactly new: it’s rooted in learning theory and operant conditioning, **which mainly involves the addition or withdrawal of reinforcement**. Dog training has shifted from the old obedience-driven model to a more relationship-based approach. **The use of punishment actually slows a dog’s progress, because they damage its confidence and, more importantly, its relationship with a handler.**



Example 1.: Better performance less stress

These new methods are backed by a growing body of science: A study from Portugal evaluated dozens of dogs selected from schools that either employed the use of shock collars, leash corrections and other aversive techniques or sticking entirely or almost entirely to the use of positive reinforcement (treats) to get the behaviour they wanted: Dogs from the “positive schools” universally performed better at tasks the researchers put in front of them, and the dogs from “aversive schools” displayed considerably more stress, both in observable ways—licking, yawning, pacing,

whining—and in cortisol levels measured in saliva swabs. Thus: The less negativity is used in training, the more quickly the dogs learn.

Example 2.: Higher efficiency

Over the past 15 years, handlers who train dogs for the Blind have extinguished nearly all negative training techniques and with dramatic results. A new dog can now be ready to guide its owner in half the time it once took, and they can remain with an owner for an extra year or two, because they're so much less stressed out by the job.

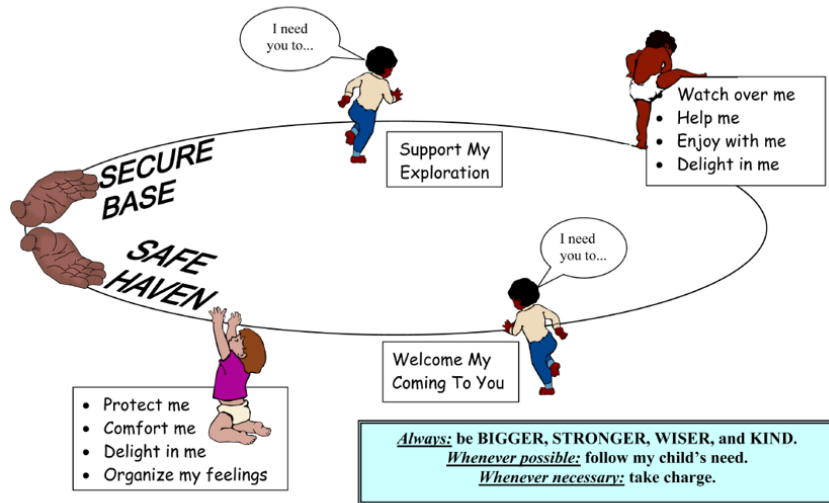
Example 3: Extinction of behaviour and teaching alternative behaviour at the same time by training and rewarding an alternative behaviour instead of ignoring or punishing undesirable behaviour. Trainers have discovered new ways to replace an aversive technique with a positive: if a dog scratches (instead of politely sitting) at the door to be let out, many trainers would have in recent years advised owners to ignore the scratching so as not to reward the behaviour. They would hope for “extinction,” for the dog to eventually stop doing the bad thing that results in no reward. But that's an inherently negative approach. What if it could be replaced with something positive? Now, many trainers would recommend redirecting the scratching dog to a better behaviour, a *come* or a *sit*, rewarded with a treat. The bad behaviour not only goes extinct, but the dog learns a better behaviour at the same time!

2. Human-animal bond: Myth or reality? (see dogtopia.com)

A strong bond forms the foundation of your relationship with your dog. The existence of a human-like bonding/attachment has been proven by the “Strange Situation Test” (Ainsworth). We find attachment patterns equal to human attachment patterns in dogs: Secure attachment, insecure attachment (avoiding or anxious-ambivalent) or disorganised attachment. A secure attachment develops if the owner is able to act as “**secure base**” and as a “**safe haven**”)

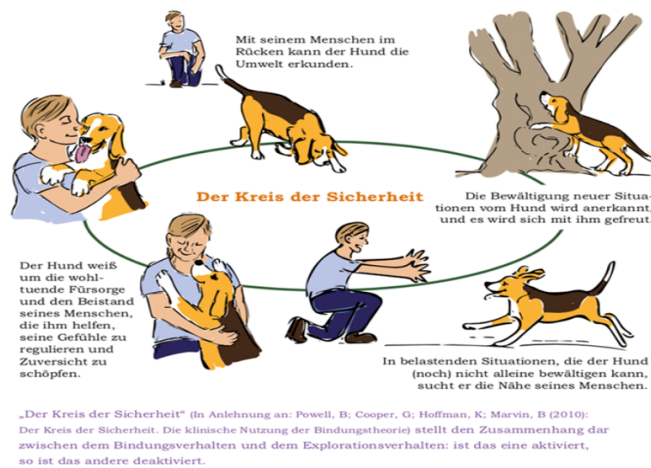
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When we look at human-dog relationships what we tend to see is a series of “**human-created bond infractions**” that have picked away at the strength of the relationship between dog and person. Some are major, such as **physical punishment or not providing enough exercise**, while others are more difficult to pinpoint—a lack of confidence or an unwillingness to have fun with the pup, for example. Basic training certainly can improve the relationships, but we often find less good training outcomes where we have a weak bond.

In order to have happy, frustration-free partnerships with our dogs, **we need more than just love and training**. Instead, we must **cement a bond with our dog, built on trust, mutual respect and regard**.

- Dogs can form new bonds at any age
- The kind and loving interaction as well as the time spent with the owner forms the bond
- The dog learns to be confident in the owner's abilities as a pack leader/parent (not "alpha") and will trust the owner to diffuse threatening situations
- Training in a firm but fair manner (calm and consistent) without being verbally or physically abusive strengthens the bond

SIGNS THAT YOUR BOND IS WEAK

- Emotional indifference to you or others in the family. A failure to respond to commands, especially the recall command
- A lack of desire to play
- A distaste for being handled
- Regular attempts to run off
- Poor focus and eye contact
- Belligerence or even outright aggression toward you
- Depression or lethargic behaviour

SIGNS OF A STRONG BOND

- Eye contact, lots of physical contact, vocalizing joy when seeing you
- Keeping tabs on your location when they are off leash
- Frequently checking in to see where you're at
- Performing obedience happily without hesitation
- Making a great effort to find you when you play hide-and-seek
- A desire to be near you
- A high level of focus on you, evidenced by frequently looking at you
- Strong ability to communicate needs, wants, and concerns. (Do you understand what your dog wants in almost any given situation?)
- A willingness to protect or help you in a threatening situation. (At the same time, know that a dog can easily slide into guarding so protection by itself doesn't necessarily equal love).
- A love for physical interaction

2.1 How to improve bonding with your dog

BE CLEAR! AVOID COMMANDS WITH TOO MANY WORDS: It's fine to have commands but when you get beyond 3 words it's far too tasking. A great experiment is to try to spend a whole day not saying a word to your dog but communicating only with your

body. You'll realize just how involved a conversation can be without emitting a single sound.

HUGGING YOUR DOG: Most dogs hate hugs. Remember: If a dog places a foreleg or paw on the back of another dog, this is considered an act of control.

PETTING A DOG'S FACE OR PATTING HER HEAD: Ideally, it's best to come in under the chin so they know they can easily withdraw if they are uncomfortable.

KISSES: Dog's use their tongue lick as a sign of submission, not love. You should never demand a kiss from your dog since all you're doing is forcing dominance on your dog.

PICKING THEM UP LIKE A BABY: Keep their paws down and you'll have a happier pup, as soon as you turn them over, you're increasing their anxiety.

PROLONGED EYE CONTACT: The more familiar you are with a dog the more you can maintain steady eye contact

NOT PROVIDING STRUCTURE AND RULES: Dogs want, need and love rules. Rules (enforced with positive rewards) make life predictable, less confusing and less stressful. They also don't understand exceptions to rules.

FORCING YOUR DOG TO INTERACT WITH DOGS OR PEOPLE HE/SHE CLEARLY DOESN'T LIKE: When dogs are pushed too far in social situations, they're more likely to lash out with a fight or a bite. It is your job to protect your dog and NO, dogs that do not belong to the same family are not good in sorting things out among themselves.

KEEPING A TIGHT LEASH (LITERALLY): Just as dogs are amazing at reading our tension levels even through the leash. By keeping a tight leash on a dog, you're raising the level of stress, frustration, and excitement for your dog.

TEASING: Don't do something you know makes a dog mad just because you think it's funny.

FORCING THEM IN SCARY SITUATIONS: We sometimes have to bring our pets into unfamiliar circumstances but whenever possible try and not put them in scary situations. If you know you will be taking your pup into unknown territory, take along some treats for positive reinforcement. Never force a fearful dog to except being handled or touched by a stranger. This "flooding" will make your dog "freeze" and resign or lash out with a fight or a bite (both not ideal for a healthy bonding)

ASSERTING DOMINANCE BY LEANING OVER A PUPPY: Side by side engagement is far better.

REMAIN CALM: Yelling will frighten most dogs, even if that anger isn't directed at them personally. And if it is, then it's even more damaging. Yelling doesn't do anything to fix the problem, it only causes lasting damage to the relationship you have with your dog.

3. Dominance theory outdated

The “new” training methods (using mainly positive reinforcement) are backed by a growing body of science—and a rejection of the old thinking, of wolves (and their descendants, dogs) as dominance-oriented creatures. The origin of so-called “**alpha theory**” comes from a scientist named Rudolph Schenkel, who conducted a study of wolves in 1947 in which animals from different packs were forced into a small enclosure *with no prior interaction*. They fought, naturally, which Schenkel interpreted as a battle for dominance. The reality, Schenkel was later forced to admit, was that the wolves were stressed, not striving for alpha status.

Schenkel's 1947 “Expressions Studies on Wolves” gave rise to the notion of alpha wolves. That concept was based on the idea that wolves fight within a pack to gain dominance and that the winner is the “alpha” wolf. Today we understand that most wolf packs consist of a pair of adults called “parents” or “breeders,” (not “alphas”), and their offspring.

Trainers following the idea of the **Dominance Theory** in their dog training tend to use physical punishment (hitting, harsh leash correction) or sharp verbal signals to train the desired behaviour. They encourage dog owners to always demonstrate their position of being the “alpha” of the pack. Some techniques include sharp leash corrections, hitting or kicking the dog, using electric shock, applying physical force to push a dog into a submissive position, or the “alpha roll,” which forces the dog to roll onto his back in a submissive position. And yes, it seems to work! You will possibly see a temporary “improvement” in the behaviour after punishing him, but remember, he is only operating and obeying out of fear or avoidance. In the long run, however, you will end up with a dog that is not only afraid of you or certain situations but may also react aggressive towards you and towards other people.

The level of aggression displayed by the dogs depends on the specific punishment technique implemented:

Hitting or kicking- 43%, Growling at dog- 41%, Forced release of item- 38 %, Alpha roll- 31%, Forced dominance down- 29%, Grab scruff of neck- 26%, Stare down threat- 30%, Prong collar correction-11% (Stachelhalsband), Leash correction- 6%, "Schhht" sound correction- 3%

3.1 How different methods of training and interaction work (see www.cuteness.com)

It's important to focus on **positive reinforcement** while training your dog and avoid punishments. When your dog misbehaves, **he should be corrected or trained to do the right thing** instead of being "punished", involving physical force.

Before you attempt to change his behaviour in any way, you first want to understand his behaviour. Understanding why he does what he does (fear, resource guarding, not understanding the command, no alternative behaviour), accepting his limitations and embracing his potential are all crucial first steps in the training process.

When you are going to correct your dog, it's important to do so immediately. Catch your dog red-handed and correct him right then and there (No! and redirect, e.g., giving him his toy to chew). This way, your dog knows exactly why he is being corrected and isn't simply learning to be afraid of you and to act submissively whenever you seem angry or annoyed.

Instead of punishing bad behaviour, reward good behaviour! This is typically done by giving your dog a treat, a toy, or praise whenever he performs a desired action. The most important keys to getting positive reinforcement to work are **consistency and timing** (just like when you correct your dog). Consistency and perfect timing let your dog know exactly what behaviour is being rewarded.

4. Reinforcement: What it is and what it isn't

Reinforcement is anything that causes behaviour to increase. To know whether a behaviour has been reinforced, we must ask, "Did the behaviour increase?" **If the behaviour did not increase, it was not reinforced!**

Positive reinforcement = adding something nice (treat, playtime, praise)

Negative reinforcement = taking something (stressful) away (dog barks, the person walking on the street walks on = Briefträgerphänomen; dogs sits, the tension in the leash is relaxed)

To know what is reinforcing a behaviour, we must look at two things:

- 1) What happened immediately after the behaviour (the consequence: adding good or taking away stress)
- 2) Did this increase the behaviour? (Was it reinforced?)

Positive reinforcement is the addition of something after a behaviour occurs, followed by the target behaviour increasing. Negative reinforcement is the removal of something after a behaviour occurs, also followed by the target behaviour increasing. The easiest way to keep these straight is to think of “positive” as adding something, and “negative” as subtracting something, and “reinforcement” as increasing the behaviour.

4.1 If behaviour is not increasing by reinforcement (pos or neg)

- Too low value (same pebbles that are used as regular food)
- Too far apart (training to little)
- Too late (more than 2 sec later)
- Inconsistent (sometimes the target behaviour is reinforced, sometimes not)
- Too little repetitions

5. Neuroscience: change behaviour by encouraging of by discouraging

Encouraging or discouraging target behaviour can be done and *processed by the brain* in two ways. The one way is neurochemically situated in the **Amygdala** and is done by ignoring or punishing the dog or by taking away stress (pushing up and lowering stress hormones like adrenalin and cortisol are involved). The other way is processed in the **Hippocampus** by rewarding behaviour/not rewarding behaviour (e.g. Dopamine involved).

5.1 Which emotions are respectively triggered?

Amygdala (“Stress hormones”): Taking away stress (relief) or adding punishment (fear, stress, pain) → leash correction, hitting, alpha roll, prong collar, e-collar (shock mode)

Hippocampus (“reward and love hormones”): Adding a reward (joy) or not giving/taking away a reward (frustration) → clicker training, marker signals, e-collar (sound mode)

6. 3 steps in handling undesirable dog behaviour

There are basically only three ways to handle dog behaviour that you find undesirable: Prevent it, change it or live with it! **Socialization, Training or management!**

6.1 Prevent and change unwanted behaviour by SOZIALIZATION

Puppy Socialization: During your puppy’s first 8-20 weeks of life, he will experience a socialization period that will permanently shape his future personality and how he will react to his environment as an adult dog. Proper socialization can prevent a dog from being fearful of children, for example, or of riding in a car, and it will help him develop into a well-mannered, happy companion.

- **Introduce the puppy to new sights, sounds, and smells:** Try to come up with as many different types of people, places, noises, and textures as you can and expose your puppy to them. **Make it positive:** Most importantly, when introducing all of these new experiences to your puppy, make sure he’s getting treats and praise, so that he associates what he’s being exposed to and the feeling of seeing something new as a fun experience.
- **Involve the family or other people:** By having different people take part in the socialization process, you’re continuously moving the puppy out of his comfort zone, letting him know that he might experience something new no matter who he’s with.
- **Take baby steps:** Try to avoid doing too much too fast.
- **Take it public:** Once your puppy is used to the small amount of stimuli, move outside of his comfort zone to expand the amount of new experiences he’ll have. Take him over to a friend’s house for a puppy playdate, on different streets in the neighbourhood, and so one.
- **Go to puppy classes:** These classes not only help your puppy begin to understand basic commands, but the most important advantage is that they expose him to other dogs and people.

What About Older Dogs? If you've acquired a dog who is no longer a puppy, you can still help him associate new or fearful situations with a positive experience, even though you've missed the crucial puppy socialization period. Slowly reintroducing the dog to new sights, smells, and sounds, with careful supervision and an emphasis on positivity in the form of praise and treats can help him overcome his fears or hesitation.

Example: Growling at strangers – the dog learns to pair the presence of the stranger with something great! *Never punish growling as it is a symptom of discomfort.* Punishing might lead to biting incidents without prior warning

- change from negative association to positive by using **de-sensitization** (gradual exposure, never give the opportunity to practice the unwanted behaviour) and **counter conditioning** (changing the emotional response)
- Cautiously (by taking baby steps) pair every (!) encounter with a stranger with a positive reward (treat or toy)
- Tip: By throwing the reward behind you the dog has the opportunity to get further away from the stimulus and will also learn to turn away from stressful encounters
- *Don't ever allow anybody to bend over the dog, touch or hug him without getting the ok from you and your dog!*
- No staring in the eyes!

6.3 Change behaviour by TRAINING making use of positive reinforcement and a healthy securely bonded relationship

- Be clear and consistent ("Clarity is kindness" Susan Garrett)
- Decide on an **alternative behaviour** that can be rewarded (What is possible alternative behaviour to leash pulling, to barking, to chasing the cat...)
- Many repetitions, short training sessions
- **Positive reinforcement of desired/correct behaviour:** Lots of treats, touching, use of voice (high pitched or low, depending on situation and dog), tug games
- Train a "waterproof" stop-signal and recall command
- Train the behaviour using different distraction intensities

6.4 Avoid situations by MANAGEMENT (before alternative behaviour is introduced/waterproofed or with stress related behaviour – dogs can also develop post traumatic symptoms)

- Read the body language, detect stress or calming signals early
- Break off stressful situation well in time to protect your dog or others from your dog
- Avoid certain situations (e.g., meeting a dog that reacts reactive/aggressively) by taking a different route, avoid areas that make the dog react with fear

- Restrict the dog's freedom of movement (leash, recall leash, Halti, muzzle, put the dog in a different room, etc.) to be able to avoid situations or to intervene in time

6.4 Coping with challenges caused by other dogs

- Socialize your dog as early as possible, *but avoid any bad experiences*
- Keep your dog safe by reading the body language of your own and other dogs
- Keep calm, control your voice and breathing
- Intervene early by leading your dog away, you may even consider running in the opposite direction if your dog is off leash, if appropriate, use "silly voice"
- Avoid certain places and people
- Follow your gut feeling (dogs are hardly ever able "to sort out stress on their own") but try not to overreact! If you are nervous around other dogs your dog will sense this!
- Never stand between two fighting dogs
- Hitting, kicking, screaming, pulling on the dogs may trigger more aggression, even aggression being redirected towards owner
- What to do instead: Throw a bucket of water
 - Lift the dogs (every owner his own dog) from behind so that they lose touch with the front paws (must be done at the same time!)
 - Put the dogs away (e.g.in the car), don't let them meet again just moments later