Session title: **An introduction to the ODE protocol: A 10-step system for building our dog's skills for ignoring environmental distractions / "triggers".**

Presenter: Sharon Carroll

Time: Friday (October 6) 9:15am-10:45am

Location: Hall 3

Session description: In this "introduction to ODE" session, Sharon will discuss the Offered Durational Engagement (ODE) pattern and the 10-step ODE protocol. There are no pre-requisite skills for teams in the working spots. For teams that have already established the initial ODE pattern and/or have worked through the higher steps of the protocol, consider joining Sharon's other session - "Working through the higher levels of the ODE protocol: Adding in distractions / "triggers."

<div align="center">About Offered Durational Engagement (ODE)</div>

When our dog perceives a stimulus that interests or concerns them, a portion of their attention shifts to that stimulus. At this point we may only see evidence of "split focus" (i.e. glancing away from us and the task, responding more slowly to our cues, missing cues, performing an "incorrect" behavior, etc.), or our dog may perform a large reaction that we perceive as inappropriate or extreme (e.g. lunging, barking, whining, squealing, leaping, leaving us and rushing to the stimulus, attempts to run away, unable to respond to our cues in the presence of the stimulus, etc.).

Our dog's response to the stimulus may be driven by emotion (e.g. fear, excitement, frustration, etc.), it may be driven by instinct (e.g. prey drive, etc.), or it may occur due to prior learning (i.e. expectation of a specific outcome, or a previously formed habit).

Offered Durational Engagement (ODE) is a simple pattern that forms the foundations for a 10-step protocol. For dogs responding due to emotions, the protocol helps to reduce the intensity of their feelings and hence their response. For dogs responding due to instinct or habit, the protocol helps our dog to find time to think between the stimulus and their response, so instead of going from stimulus to the existing automatic response, our dog is able to think before responding. This increased cognitive processing allows our dog to choose to perform a more appropriate alternative behavior instead of performing the existing inappropriate or extreme response. Using positive reinforcement strategies, we can then ensure that our dog perceives the new response as more rewarding than the original response.

ODE is useful as both a behavior modification protocol for reactivity, as well as a protocol for helping our competition dogs build their skills for comfortably ignoring and dismissing people / dogs / movement / sounds in training and competition environments.

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Pre-session notes

(For interest only – not "required reading")

What is the ODE pattern? What is the ODE protocol?

The ODE pattern is an exercise that rewards Offered Durational Engagement; as part of the pattern our dog offers sustained focus on us and is immediately rewarded with a treat. Once our dog recognizes the pattern, they will rapidly initiate the next rep after each treat is delivered. It is a stationary exercise that is used both to "test" our dog's perception of the challenge level of an environment, and also as a tool to achieve desensitization to specific stimuli.

The ODE protocol is the entire 10-step protocol. It includes the first 8 steps using the ODE pattern and also includes step 9 (adding other reinforced behaviors instead of the ODE pattern) and step 10 (carefully increasing the arousal level of our dog up to the level required for their sports/play behaviors - remaining aware that until well-rehearsed, increased arousal can provoke a return to previous "unwanted" responses). For our dog to be successful, the first 8 steps need to be routinely practiced before undertaking steps 9 and 10.

How can I use the ODE pattern to interpret my dog's feelings about the challenge level of an area?

When we are in the ODE pattern, we can use our dog's behavior / body language as direct communication from our dog to let us know how they rate the challenge level of the environment.

VERY LOW – Our dog feels no DESIRE or NEED to look at other stimuli in the environment, hence they remain focused on us between each rep to rapidly initiate the next rep (and hence gain access to the next treat).

LOW – Our dog feels some DESIRE or NEED to look around the environment or to focus on a specific stimulus, hence between some (or all) reps our dog briefly shifts their focus away from us. At this level of challenge our dog is able to independently disconnect from focusing on elements in the environment and is able to re-engage with us quickly (within 3 seconds) and without any prompting / interrupting from us.

MODERATE – Our dog feels a fairly strong DESIRE or NEED to look around the environment or to focus on a specific stimulus, hence our dog looks away from us between two reps and gets stuck focusing on a specific stimulus (watching, listening, air scenting). They do not return their focus to us within 3 seconds, but when we use a positive interrupter (e.g. say something, make a noise, squeak a toy, rustle a treat bag, shuffle our feet, wave a piece of food near their nose, etc.), they are able to immediately re-focus on us.

HIGH – Our dog feels a very strong DESIRE or NEED to look around the environment or to focus on a specific stimulus, hence our dog re-orients their attention away from us and they are not easily interrupted. At this point they may also be performing high energy behaviors (pulling / leaping / spinning, with or without vocalization), or they may be quite still. The key feature of this level of challenge is the inability to solidly re-focus on us when interrupted / prompted.

This same scale can be used in more general terms (not just in the ODE pattern) as per the chart below. The two key areas we assess are our 1. dog's ability to engage with us, and 2. their "interest" in stimuli other than us and the task we are working on.

Intensity	Engagement	Focus on stimulus
Very Low	Dog fully engaged and readily takes treats.	Mostly not interested.
Low	Dog can engage and take treats but is distracted.	Starting to need to repeatedly check on stimulus.
Moderate	Dog can intermittently engage and can typically still take treats.	Gets stuck on stimulus at times but is able to disengage.
High	Dog cannot engage and typically cannot take treats.	Re-orients all focus to stimulus.

Our goal is for our dog to demonstrate that they perceive the environmental challenge to be VERY LOW before asking our dog to "work" (i.e. undertake competition type behaviors); and/or to demonstrate that they perceive the environmental challenge to be VERY LOW or LOW prior to being released in an area for "free time".

How do I know if my choice of environments is too challenging for my dog?

- When we are working with a dog that is demonstrating fear-based concerns about stimuli, we need to be very careful to always remain in the VERY LOW and LOW zones only. In conjunction with reading our dog's behavioral response to the ODE pattern, we also need to continually monitor our dog's comfort levels by watching their more subtle body language (e.g. is their tail low or jammed down, are their ears pinned back, are the whites of their eyes showing, are they crouching, are they whimpering / whining, are they attempting to perform escape behaviors, avoidance behaviors, displacement behaviors, appeasement behaviors, or displaying stress signals). We do not want to see any evidence of this type of body language or behavior when working with our dogs. If we see these signs, we need to reduce the challenge immediately.

- When we are working with a dog that is not demonstrating fear-based concerns (i.e. their "interest" / responses are due to prey drive, chase behaviors, guarding behaviors, excitement, frustration, etc.) - then we may be able to undertake ODE in slightly more challenging zones - this means occasionally (maybe once or twice in a 10 treat rep) we may enter the MODERATE zone (i.e. this is the zone where we need to use a positive interrupter because our dog became so focused on a stimulus that they did not return their focus to us within 3 seconds).

  - If we can easily interrupt (i.e. our dog gets stuck looking at a stimulus but as soon as we speak, or shuffle our feet, or make a small amount of noise, etc., our dog is immediately able to solidly re-focus on us), then we are at the very early part of the MODERATE zone.

  - If we need to work hard to interrupt (i.e. it takes multiple cues, or we have to move a few steps, etc.) or our dog physically re-orients towards the stimulus, then we are in the high part of the MODERATE zone and we are getting extremely close to the HIGH zone. When we see these reactions, the situation is a bit too challenging - if it happens once in a session (especially with a stimulus that was moving around), we may decide to continue, but if it happened a second time, we would immediately reduce the challenge and/or move away.

- In the HIGH zone our dog really can't listen to us at all. We don't want to be in the HIGH zone at any time with any dog. If this happens, immediately use distraction techniques and/or management strategies, and move to a more suitable location as quickly as possible.

Recognize "tells" (subtle changes in behavior).

When we see changes in our dog's behavior or body language, don't just dismiss them. If we do ODE in location A, and our dog has all four feet firmly on the ground and they are taking the treats in a soft way, but then in location B our dog's feet are dancing on the spot, or the front feet are bouncing off the ground, or the treats are being taken in a "sharkey" way, this is invaluable information for us. It tells us that location B is more challenging for our dog, than location A. We don't want to be waiting for our dog to have a big response or ignore us completely before we recognize that the environment is affecting our dog. Look for the subtle "tells".

When and how do we progress beyond ODE, and how do we progress from stationary to moving?

The ODE pattern is a stationary exercise.

The progression beyond the stationary ODE pattern occurs at Step 9 in the ODE protocol. At step 9 we transition from the stationary ODE pattern to implementing reinforced alternative behaviors (RABs). The RAB can be any behavior that has previously been trained to fluency, and that suits the situation (stationary or moving).

Here is an example of how we could determine what to do in any specific situation:

- First undertake ODE until our dog looks like they are consistently in the VERY LOW or LOW zones in that space. This may happen within a few reps of ODE in an area our dog considers "easy", or it may take many sessions to get to this point in an area our dog considers "highly challenging". Whether our dog perceives the area as easy or challenging will depend on many factors including the amount of neutral exposure our dog has had to that space or similar spaces. Once our dog is consistently in the VERY LOW and LOW zones, then ODE can be replaced with whatever RAB makes sense for that situation. That may be a behavior suited to moving around a busy area (e.g. moving hand touch, contact heeling, focused heeling, etc.), a behavior suited to waiting in a busy space (e.g. a stay in heel position or straddle position, or

stationing on a mat, etc.), or performing competition behaviors in a training area, a warm up area, or a trial ring.

Our dog's response to the ODE pattern can help us to decide exactly which behavior we should implement in a certain setting. For example, when wanting to move through a busy area or past something stimulating there are two choices depending on whether our dog perceives the space as "easy" or "highly challenging".

1. If we assess the situation, and we anticipate our dog is likely to find the area "challenging" (i.e. they are likely to reach the MODERATE zone) - use active management - e.g. a treat in our hand and lure our dog through the area.

2. If we assess the situation, and we anticipate our dog is likely to find the area "easy" (i.e. they are likely to remain in the VERY LOW and/or LOW zones) - we can instead use any pre-trained RAB - e.g. use a moving hand touch, or heel through the area. We can stop briefly to reward the behavior with a treat at times during the walking or we can reward at the end only (this will be dependent on the maximum duration we have rehearsed previously with that particular behavior).

In this practical session we will start with a brief discussion about the factors that determine where our dog focuses their attention (i.e. on us, or on another stimulus in the environment), then we will move on to training Step 1 of the ODE pattern.

The end picture of step 1 is focused eye contact (or at least a solid focus on the handler's face for dogs uncomfortable with direct eye contact) without the use of a verbal cue to initiate the focus. We will be aiming for sets of 6-10 treats (i.e. 6-10 reps in quick succession), with short breaks between sets.

For dogs that struggle to establish or maintain solid, calm, eye contact, we will problem solve those issues (e.g. focus flickering from face to hand, struggling with duration, "losing interest" in remaining engaged, frustration barking, cycling through other previously reinforced behaviours, etc.).

For any dog familiar with offering eye contact this first step will likely be mastered very quickly, hence we will move on to steps 2 and/or 3 (adding in "distractions") with some dogs in this session.

On Friday (October 6) afternoon (1:40pm-3:40pm) we will move on to a practical session covering the higher levels of the ODE protocol in Hall 4.