



# Chronicles of a Dog Trainer



Sunday, April 2, 2017

## Stop walking your dog.

"Wait did you just say don't walk my dog? Are you crazy?!"

. . . actually, I'm pretty sane (on most days, don't ask my kids or husband they may say differently!)



The truth is I'm actually pretty good at reading dogs, understanding dog behavior and working with each individual dog on what they actually need vs what we *think* they need. **It's pretty vital to understand these things in order to truly help dogs.**

It can be a bit murky at times, i.e., understanding what dogs need vs what we *think* they need. **Everyone assumes that all dogs need to be walked (or even more strenuous exercise than walking) everyday.** This is especially true for active, young dogs as well as some specific breeds. Let's discuss why this may not actually be beneficial to active dogs regardless of energy level or breed.

It's been drilled into dog owners' heads that walking a dog makes them calmer, more relaxed and less likely to have behavior problems. Hmmm, not really. I mean, well sort of. Well, let me explain . . .

I'm not saying dogs don't need exercise. I'm not saying this at all. Movement and exercise is important for all creatures. So, do understand, exercise is very important for your dog. However, **it's more like a creative strategy and work of art to figure out what is best for each dog when it comes to exercise and energy outlets.** Every dog is an individual, even within the same breed and/or gene pool.

### DOES YOUR DOG APPLY?

For the most part **this blog post addresses the hyper, over-active, hard-to-settle-down-regardless-what-you-do types of dogs, reactive-when-on-leash (or otherwise), not the already mentally stable dogs that can relax easily.** However it is important to note that I feel this would benefit all active and working dogs, and definitely all reactive, aggressive and/or anxious/insecure dogs!

### WHAT EXERCISE DOES FOR DOGS.

**Exercise will get your dog in peak physical health,** especially if you're doing vigorous or lengthy exercise regimes. While this is great for your dog's health and physical well-being it might backfire for mental stability.

Usually adolescent, hyper, over-excitabile and active dogs are the dogs that are exercised the most because they are the most difficult to live with. **The common thought is that the dog is super active/hyper/energetic and needs more exercise to release this energy** and help "calm them down". When in fact **what usually happens is huge dumps of adrenaline the more you exercise your dog which will in turn make your dog's mental state more chaotic.** Why? Because most dogs that behave in this manner in the first place are already mentally chaotic and need more relaxation and calming exercises not adrenaline-inducing ones.



There is another problem with relying on physical exercise *solely* as a means to "wear your dog out",

### WELCOME!

This blog will take a personal turn discussing opinions and thoughts from dog trainer Stacy Greer, owner of [Sunshine Dog Training & Behavior, LLC](#) (formerly Stacy's Dog Training).

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or try to live by the *A tired dog is a good dog* mantra. You will now create a dog that requires more and more exercise as your dog becomes more physically fit. **The dog, at first, will be tired and will likely even be "better" behaved but it will soon wear off and you're now spending your days trying to find more strenuous exercise or lengthening the time you exercise your dog in order to get the worn-down-dog-effect.** (You can read more on the [SuperDog Syndrome](#) over on [this blog post](#) written by Sara Reusche at [Paws Abilities Dog Training](#).)

#### DO NOTHING.

Let me say again, **I'm not advocating that you burn your leashes and stop your hiking trips on the weekends.** However, I'm saying that you can relax, and should! **If you don't feel like walking the dog today, don't. She'll be ok.** If you just don't have the energy to get out and have your dog run back and forth and back and forth for the ball, then don't.

**Dogs get far too little training and far too few brain activities. Lack of exercise isn't the problem I'm encountering with dogs** that I work with. It hasn't been the problem in 18 years of working with dogs. **The problem is lack of proper balance between mental and physical stimulation.**

It should be noted that **genetics play a role in dogs' stress levels and behaviors. Actually genetics plays a bigger role in most of our dogs' behavior(s) than I believe most know about.** Of course there are dogs with backgrounds we may never be privy to and dogs that are a mix of different genetics. This isn't to say that we can control this all the time, **it's just to say that sometimes it's not all on the dog owner that they have a dog like this,** although sometimes it is.

Many people tend to walk around the dog's life instead of having the dog adjust to theirs. **It is vital to a dog's mind to learn that sometimes they can just lie around and do nothing. Nothing. Yes, nothing.** Nada. Zip. Wait, why in the world do you think I should expect my high drive Labrador to lie on the rug? What about my Border Collie that doesn't sleep through the night unless I actually do something with her?

I'll get to the specifics of the what-to-do and how-to-do-it in a bit . . .

#### OVERAROUSAL.

Herein lies the problem. Overarousal. **High energy and high drive dogs that are usually over-exercised physically or under stimulated mentally, or both, tend to be the hardest dogs to live**



**with.** Why? Because owners are doing what they thought they should—exercising the dog every day, sometimes for long periods. But what are they *not* doing? **Owners are not teaching their dog to relax, chill and keep his arousal levels in check. They are also not providing some or all of the following: brain activities, training, rules, boundaries and/or consistency with most of or any of those things.**

**Dogs with high arousal levels will manifest their lack of ability to do nothing into behaviors that are usually very annoying to live with.** This is often a dog that cannot relax or lie down peacefully for more than 10 minutes, or a dog that barks incessantly, or a dog that drops the ball at your feet every 5 minutes, or a dog that paces or whines for seemingly no reason, or a dog that is a very destructive chewer, or a dog that is reactive on-leash towards other dogs and/or people . . . there are many, many, many behaviors that manifest out of

over arousal. **These dogs' arousal levels become so out-of-whack that they manifest into stress, the not-so-good kind, and you have a dog that is difficult to deal with in one way or another.** Many times these are the dogs that fill the shelters.

#### AROUSAL & STRESS, AREN'T THEY NORMAL?

We cannot have dogs live in a bubble, **all dogs become over-aroused at some point and also stressed in various ways and situations.** These are all things that happen in life; we can help our dogs overcome arousal and stress in situations—*when we are given the proper tools to do so.* However, too **often dog owners aren't given the appropriate tools to deal with or avoid over-arousal and stress, or worse, the tools to understand what it is and what it looks like. When this happens dogs exhibit these things too often and dog owners think this is just how the dog is and fall prey to the exercise-your-dog-more mantra.** They do not realize that they actually can have a calm and relaxed dog with the appropriate training and understanding of it all! [insert sigh of relief]

#### IS MY DOG REALLY IN NEED OF LESS EXERCISE?!

**My first suggestion is to understand what your dog is saying and doing and why. Understanding body language and communication cues will get you very far with your dog, very, very far.** Also, find a trainer that is well educated in both of these things. Not all trainers are, they should be, but many are not (if you need help with finding one let me know I'll do my best to help you get on the right track!) I cannot go into all these things on this blog. It's very dog-specific as well as many other factors. **A trained eye can watch your dog and educate you on what and why of all of his behaviors by observing and working with you.**

#### QUIZ TIME\*

Answer yes or no to the following questions.

#### LINKS OF PLACES I LIKE...A LOT.

[4 Paws University Training Articles](#)

[Abrams Forest Vet Clinic](#)

[Dog.com](#)

[Dogwise.com](#)

[Helping Udders](#)

[In the Company of Dogs](#)

[K9 Bike Jogger](#)

[Katy Trail Animal Hospital](#)

[Lucky Pet](#)

[Metro Pet Services](#)

[Wubba World](#)

#### VISIT MY WEBSITE.



1. Does your dog lie down at home when you are busy and leave you alone?
2. Does your dog chew things when left alone or if you aren't paying enough attention to him?
3. Does your dog bark for attention at you and/or at other dogs/people when out on leash?
4. Does your dog have a sensitive stomach and/or diarrhea often?
5. Does your dog sometimes seem "stubborn"?
6. Does your dog bother you to play constantly?
7. Does your dog not seem to wear out?
8. Does your dog sometimes not sleep all night and/or wake you in the night?
9. Does your dog get rowdy with other dogs and play rough all the time?
10. Does your dog not calm down fairly quickly and/or not at all when guests come over?

If you answered "YES" to 4 or more of those then likely your problem isn't a lack of enough physical exercise. It's more likely due to over-extended levels of over-arousal and/or over-stimulation that aren't easily able to be put in check.

*\*Note: You could have answered "no" and this is still your dog's issue. This isn't some magical quiz that determines this. So, please do take into account that your dog still may need to have the following protocols to benefit him or her. A trained professional is the key here.*

### YOUR GOLDEN TICKET.

First thing in order is to teach your dog to do nothing ... and be ok with it. This will be your saving grace. Period, the end. **Dogs like this need to learn to relax, actually they have to be trained how to do this** because they don't have the ability to do it on their own. Also dogs that are exercised a lot and still seem to be unable to settle must learn this. **This is your very first line of defense!**



**So, before you do anything. You *must* do this. Train your dog to do nothing. Absolutely nothing.** This teaches them that they can lie there and be ok with whatever is going on around them. If you want to elicit play, walks, games or training you will do so. However, if you aren't doing that then Fido should be cool with waiting and chilling while doing this. I highly recommend two books, and really you should stop reading now and go purchase these— ["Fired Up, Frantic and Freaked Out"](#) by [Laura VanArendonk Baugh, CPDT-KA, KPACTP](#) as well as ["Chill Out Fido!"](#) by [Nan Arthur](#).

... Go on, get on over to amazon. ... Ok, done with your purchases? Good. Let's move along ...

**Doing this is not without work, mainly a load of calm patience and consistency. Remain cool, calm and set your dog up for success**, i.e., don't put her in a situation where she can practice the behaviors you don't want. That may mean crating him when you cannot interact or something else. But for now you are no longer allowed to let your dog be hyper-crazy and demanding, if that goes along with your pooch's repertoire.

Nan Arthur (who wrote the book recommended above, "Chill Out Fido") has a [PDF handout called "Relax on a Mat"](#) with **step-by-step instructions on how to teach your dog to relax on a mat/bed** (also discussed/laid out in her book). **Here is a great video and description on "The Nothing Exercise"** coined by Sue Sternberg.

**\*Please note: Relax on a Mat is *not* the same as teaching your dog to go lie on a mat/bed on cue (when you ask).** This exercise is to actually teach and create calmness on a mat/bed. One is training a cue, "go to your bed!" (in training mode and brain still turned on), the other is training an emotional state (calmness/relaxation where the brain is turned off).

**Also train your dog to relax calmly in a crate**, behind a gate and/or in an x-pen. I prefer the crate to all as it can be used when travelling and for many other reasons (read my blog post on crates, ["Crate Training Truths & Tips"](#)). **I highly recommend utilizing [Susan Garrett's "Crate Games"](#) for this.** Remarkable for teaching impulse control as well as how to love going in and being in a crate.

### ENRICHMENT GAMES, EQUIPMENT & PUZZLES.



This is your next line of defense. **Get your dog's brain moving. These things are great ways to do this without really doing much on your part.** These can benefit the dog while you are busy and/or at work, on a phone call, etc. However ... but, but, but ... it is very important to read this next part.

This is why I wrote this blog post. You can Google all day and find mentally stimulating games and puzzles and how-to use them, etc.

You can also read all about these things being a "fix" for hyper dogs and dogs that need to chill out more. But here's the rub. I have worked with owners who state, "Ok so we stopped trips to the dog park and incorporated lots of brain activities and mental stimulation but we are still not exactly where we want to be." This happens because they didn't teach the dog to relax and do nothing (see above "Your Golden Ticket").

So, it's important to go through the steps here as I wrote them out. Now, **once your dog has learned some**

great relaxation exercises and is able to actually do nothing then you are ready to start with these fun brain activities. You can of course be doing these things at the same time you are teaching the relaxation (I don't mean the *exact same* time but in conjunction with the training) but *you must be doing the relaxation protocol* and [The Nothing Exercise](#).

**There are so many fun and engaging things you can do with your dog.** Many of them are DIY things too, but there are tons of things you can purchase as well. **I couldn't possibly list them all here. So I went and made a [Pinterest board full of them for you!](#)** You're welcome. I'll add to the board all the time so bookmark it and check it often for updates.

Now, how to go about this exactly ... Here is a nice little order for you to do things ... and guess what I'm adding exercise back in there! Oh heck yeah I am! You just had to get this far to see I'm not a total moron.

## IMPLEMENT THE 8-STEP PROTOCOL: THE COOL CUCUMBER CANINE.

### ONE.

**Stop all the exercise you're currently doing.** Yup. All of it. If you live where you don't have a yard or area that your dog can go potty without being walked then of course walk your dog for a potty break. However do not go on an exercise walk, for now. Only potty walks.

### TWO.

**Feed your dog out of a food puzzle for at least 1 meal a day,** if not all of them (assuming you feed 2 x a day at least.) I'm going to attach my own handout on ["Dog Puzzles"](#) and ["Kong Recipes for Fun"](#). **Feed your dog high quality food and add a [doggie probiotic](#) to his food.** The brain-gut connection is not a myth and dogs with poor diet/poor gut health often have behavior quirks at the very least and major behavior problems at the very worst. (*To learn more about dog diets that are beneficial [contact me](#) for resources.*)

### THREE.

**Work on the [relaxation protocol](#) and [The Nothing Exercise](#) as much as you can daily.** This is a must, must, must. You cannot skip this step! I promise you'll thank me later for it.

### FOUR.

**Work on Crate Games & Impulse control exercises.** I recommend working on ["It's Yer Choice"](#) as well as ["Crate Games"](#) ([full DVD here](#), YouTube videos [Part I](#), [Part II](#) & [Part III](#).) Do this for about 5-10 minutes a day, 2-3 x a day.

### FIVE.

**Incorporate some enrichment toys and activities for your dog to do, perhaps while you take that conference call in the other room?** Maybe you need to get dinner made? Perhaps you want to catch up on emails? Maybe you just want to sit down after work and not deal with the dog [that usually needs to be walked to possibly take the edge off?!] So find some times that your dog can do some of these activities.

**When Fido has completed an activity or maybe two, then he should relax on his bed or mat for you.** If you have things to take care of then Fido should be chillin' while you take care of whatever those things may be. **Do not start tossing activity after activity after activity for him. Remember we are teaching him to chill when we want** but also providing adequate mental stimulation in order to work his brain.

### SIX.

**Train your dog and incorporate more impulse control exercises with training.** Working on impulse control as well as some basic cues will be hugely beneficial. I really like [Dr. Sophia Yin's "Learn to Earn Program"](#) for this.

There are some other great reads as well, such as this article's link to [the default sit](#), as well as the book ["Control Unleashed" by Leslie McDevitt](#). (Hire a professional dog trainer if need be for this!)

### SEVEN.

**Walk the dog.** If you've been working on the above things and you feel confident in your new pooch and her ability to chill when needed, you can now take her out for a walk. There are rules though. **The walk can be no more than 15 minutes long and should be a walk where you incorporate some training and good ole doggie sniffing.** Yes. So, if your dog needs some work in the training area, then this is where a good professional is going to be invaluable for you.



[Learn to Earn Program](#)

In the meantime, because we all know you wanted some free help on this right, **I'll lay out a few things for you to do while walking your dog. Start a timer. Do not go over 15 minutes!**

**1) Work on check-ins.** This is where the dog checks back with you before going out ahead or maybe when they feel a little uneasiness coming on about something. Usually they just look up/back at you. When this happens, click/treat (C/T) [or say "Yes!"/treat]. This should be practiced indoors, before you actually go on a walk. Then you incorporate it with your walks. Here is a [handout on teaching check-ins](#). Here is a [video](#) after your dog is reliable indoors/with no distractions. You can also teach the [Positive Interrupter](#) and utilize this for lots of things.

**2) Do a lot of turns & backing up.** Walking in a straight line is boring and also sets the dog up to pull. So unless your dog is already proficient on loose leash skills I'd definitely be doing this.

I call it dance moves. Lots of footwork when out on leash with my dogs! It keeps the dog moving while also training a good loose leash. Win-win! I like this [video](#) and this [video](#) (this one is moi) for showing this.

**3) Let her be a dog, with permission.** After making your dog work for walking next to you and check-in and all that, let your dog be a dog. The best way to do this is allow your dog to go and sniff. Sniffing for dogs is highly, highly rewarding and mentally engaging. So I usually give my dogs a cue to do this. You can come up with whatever you want to use as your cue but mine is "you're free to go" as I point away from me. Then the dog can go to the end of the leash and sniff, sniff, sniff. When we're done with that I say "okay, let's go!" and they should come back to my left and we start our journey back, utilizing the above steps 1 & 2.

**4) Go home.** Remember all the above steps are only happening in a short time period (no more than 15 minutes) and not 3 blocks from your home. You should not go far, the main goal is this is a training walk not a way to get your dog *physically* tired. So just do the above for 15 minutes (or less if your dog is too out of control or not focused) and then go home. Tomorrow is a new day.

## EIGHT.

**Repeat steps 1-5 until your dog can be a calm, relaxed dog at home and do things on your watch.** If your dog still cannot relax when you're scrolling through Facebook or having a relaxing sit while watching Law & Order then you're not ready to up the exercise regime for your dog. So, don't. Just don't. Rinse and repeat this whole process with a heavy focus on the relaxation exercises if you aren't getting far.

**Once you're really confident in your dog's ability to relax you can slowly add in your regular exercise regime** whether that be walking, jogging, hiking, agility, swimming ... whatever. **However, you must remain true to the protocol above — relaxation, mental enrichment, and training — while adding in your exercise.** If you fall back into just doing physical exercise alone your dog will regress and eventually fall back into the dog you had before you started this.

You may also want to discuss some relaxation supplements with your veterinarian if your dog is really on edge (a trained professional can usually tell you if your dog is enough on edge that this may be warranted and suggest you discuss this with a licensed veterinarian). [L-Theanine](#) and [Lactium](#) have been proven to be hugely beneficial for dogs that need the edge off and/or have some anxiety that needs intervention. *(Some dogs, while not common, may require something stronger such as actual pharmaceutical drugs to help. In these cases a [Board Certified Veterinary Behaviorist](#) would be best suited to help you decide what is best.)*

## IN CONCLUSION.



This entire blog post may have your mind spinning. Heck it may even have you thinking -- Meh, I'll just keep doing what I've been doing, this is too much work!

However, you should know that **if you can commit to doing these things you'll have a dog that is chill when you want but happy to play, run and have fun when you want as well.** You'll just build a neat-o "off switch" for your dog with this protocol. So many dogs lack that "off switch" and it's not only a tad annoying (sometimes it's super annoying!) but it's also causes some real mental chaos. It's like your dog's brain cannot stop. It's not healthy and it's not fun to live that way either. **The reality is that your dog will not only be much easier to live with but also thank you for it because they can truly relax not only physically but mentally.**

**I will say that finding a qualified dog training professional will be hugely beneficial if you have a dog like this,** and if necessary a veterinarian to

collaborate with your trainer for the best options. As I mentioned before, if you need help locating a qualified professional dog trainer near you please [contact me](#).

**Stacy Greer**

Sunshine Dog Training & Behavior, LLC

[sunshinedog.com](http://sunshinedog.com)



Posted by [The Redheaded Dog Trainer](#) at 2:33:00 PM



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**14 comments:**



**Cousa** April 3, 2017 at 2:43 AM

Love this! I think I'm gonna need to teach my dog the nothing exercise. She's very good with this in the backyard, but inside is overstimulating for her. Thank you for the resources!

[Reply](#)

**Mair Macdermott** April 3, 2017 at 3:24 AM

thank you so much..this is exactly what I needed to know ..great resources :)

[Reply](#)



**Unknown** April 3, 2017 at 9:13 AM

Great article! Great resources!

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**The Redheaded Dog Trainer** April 3, 2017 at 1:39 PM

Thank you. :-)

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[Reply](#)



**John Parsons** April 3, 2017 at 11:20 AM

Well written! Learning to chill out is an essential skill for service dogs and working dogs in addition to creating well behaved pets.

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**The Redheaded Dog Trainer** April 3, 2017 at 1:39 PM

Thanks John!

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[Reply](#)



**Erin** April 3, 2017 at 12:04 PM

I have Jack Russell terriers, I love the breed and have had, over the years, six of them. The youngest one I have now is just about three years old. He was a solo pup and was a real handful when we first brought him home. I found Laura Van Arendonk Baugh's "Fired Up, Frantic and Freaked Out," early on in his training and it was a godsend. I've recommended that book and "Control Unleashed," quite often. (I haven't got "Chill Out Fido," but will look for it!)I can't thank you enough for sharing this valuable information, some of it was very familiar and some I look forward to trying. Thank you again!

[Reply](#)

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**The Redheaded Dog Trainer** April 3, 2017 at 1:37 PM

I have one JRT. He's my little love. He's now 14 years old but many moons ago we competed in Flyball. So I love that my JRT would run his little heart out and do anything for a ball but still relax and chill when I needed him too. He spends most of his days now just chilling, a little ball playing but he's not got the stamina he once did!

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[Reply](#)

**Gail Louise Annes** April 3, 2017 at 12:46 PM

First, to let you know I don't have a dog, though hopefully someday. That being said, I read every word, yes, every word & bookmarked it. Very insightful, detailed & beneficial for human & canine relationship. I hope many will implement & follow all your advice, so they will have a calm, happy & healthy dog. Btw, my sister is Tecla Walton of Tecla's K-9 in Ellicott City & Elkridge, Maryland.

[Reply](#)

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**The Redheaded Dog Trainer**  April 3, 2017 at 1:38 PM

Thank you Gail! So glad to hear you liked it ... and you have a dog trainer in the family. :-)

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[Reply](#)



**snowflakemum** April 3, 2017 at 1:30 PM

Is this suitable for puppies as well, or are they likely to be too loopy to learn this until they're older? My wcs is 21 weeks.

[Reply](#)

▼ [Replies](#)



**The Redheaded Dog Trainer**  April 3, 2017 at 1:36 PM

Absolutely! Puppies can learn at \*all\* ages! This would be a huge benefit to teach puppies. Good luck and happy training!

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[Reply](#)



**michelesner** April 3, 2017 at 6:56 PM

My reactive dog is homebound now as he has a bum knee and cannot put pressure on it, so there goes our daily walks. I have felt SO SORRY for him all this time, feeling that he is bursting with energy with no way to expend it. But now, after reading your article, it may very well be a blessing and an opportunity! Thank you so much!

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**The Redheaded Dog Trainer**  April 3, 2017 at 9:24 PM

I'm so glad to help! :-)

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