

THE INNER DOG



POSITIVE SOLUTIONS FOR NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

A Primer to Recognizing, Understanding & Working with **FEARFUL** Dogs (often called aggressive or reactive dogs)

What is **FEAR**?

- **FEAR** is an aversive and painful experience
- **FEAR** is a feeling of apprehension associated with the presence or proximity of an object, individual, social situation or a class of the above
- **FEAR** is a part of normal behavior and can be an adaptive response.
- “**FEAR** is the worst thing a social species can experience and it causes permanent damage to the brain” (Dr. C. Siracusa, Univ. Of PA School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Dept.)
- The inability or unwillingness to lower stress levels can result in serious health and behavior issues.
- It is a combination of nature and nurture: epigenetics

What Does **FEAR** Look Like?

- There are 3 stages of **FEAR**: Freeze, Flight, Fight
- There are 4 **FEAR** responses: Immobility (Freeze), Withdrawal/Avoidance (Flight), Defensive Aggression (Fight), Submission (Appeasement)
- They may be afraid due to: medical issues, genetically being predisposed, inappropriate or lack of positive socialization or a learned behavior due to abuse/trauma/neglect

How Humans Misinterpret **FEARFUL** Dogs

- We see fearful dogs as aggressive, stubborn, stupid, defiant and/or dominant
- This leads to misinformation and aversive training/punishment
- Humans are quick to punish, slow to praise
- Humans will utilize all manner of punitive tools (choke collars, prong collars, electric, shock or e-collars, shaker cans, water bottles, physical force, hollering, screaming, etc.) to suppress, create or exacerbate a behavior instead of teaching the behaviors we want.
- Dogs don't form packs like wolves; why we insist on being 'pack leaders' or alphas' in order to teach or change behavior, especially with fearful dogs is a myth that has no basis in fact or science.
- The phrase “Don't 'coddle' a fearful dog” is a myth- we all need reassurance when we are afraid

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The Canine Brain's Reaction to **FEAR**

- When a dog perceives a fear event, the body releases two primary hormones: Cortisol and Adrenaline
- Cortisol floods the brain & makes the Fight or Flight decision; Adrenaline carries out the decision
- Cortisol prevents and prohibits any new proteins from forming since learning anything new at a moment of life or death can hinder the chance for survival.
- Due to the size of a dog's brain, Cortisol can take from 24 hrs. to 7 days to dissipate from 1 fear event. These stress hormones delay recovery from an event and can suppress physical pain and lead to reflex potentiation (fast bite)
- The more events, the longer for dissipation, the longer the dog lives in a heightened state of fight or flight (trigger stacking)
- Associations made during fear events can become permanent and reactions to the associations can occur without a fear event being present (sounds, smells, objects, etc.)
- Therefore, anytime we use physical force, pain, fear, yelling, screaming, shaker cans, water bottles etc. in the belief that we are changing an undesired behavior, when in fact we are only suppressing the behavior, exacerbating the fear and further breaking down the trust that should exist between us and our dogs.
- Fear in response to something painful or disturbing can condition your pet to experience more fear in response to these circumstances

Working with a **FEARFUL** Dog

- Every organism learns the same way, no matter the size of the organism: Do something and it achieves an objective, repeat what works. Therefore, every fearful dog can learn and change its fear behaviors using force free, science based, and positive reinforcement behavior modification.
- Anxiety/dread/fear is like living on the edge of a cliff. Don't push the dog over; help them move away from the edge.
- Protect your dog from fearful experiences.
- Reassure your dog whenever it's fearful. Science tells us that respondent behaviors (fear behaviors) are NOT reinforced by an emotional response (reassurance)
- Maintain feelings of safety and security
- Prevent the creation or escalation of aggressive behavior
- Develop skills using force free, science based, positive reinforcement training and behavior modification
- Reward distance seeking. Dogs are masters of avoiding confrontation. This is what makes them one of the most successful species on earth
- Predictability (routine) lowers stress
- Rewards must be more motivating than fearful emotion

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- Distance from 'danger' is necessary to create a feeling of safety: distance ALWAYS reduces the level of fear
- Use P.E.T. Therapy: play, patience, exercise and training
- We create a Positive Partnership by:
 - Positive Intent
 - Being consistently safe
 - Predictability
 - Reliability
 - Commitment
 - Giving the dog control of their environment