

Co-operative Care

Co-operative care is a relatively new concept to the pet industry, though it has been used in zoos and aquariums for years. This is because unlike many of our pets, you can't manhandle a tiger or dolphin.

Co-operative care is a husbandry style which allows the animal to opt out of husbandry. By allowing them control, they build confidence and trust in the process. We use this with humans all the time. A dentist will often say, "if you need a break, just raise your hand". Occasionally things that must be done and can't be taken slowly but if we minimize these experiences, trust will continue to be built.

What is a start button behaviour?

A start button behaviour is the behaviour that the dog can use to tell us when they are ready. Dog trainers use these in many different scenarios. In co-operative care, pick a behaviour that your dog can be physically comfortable remaining in while you perform the husbandry task. This could be a chin rest, a nose target or holding an item for teeth checks.

Once you have taught the behaviour, start asking for it at the start of training sessions. Eventually you will not cue the behaviour, rather wait for the dog to offer it.

How do they ask for a break?

If the dog needs a break in the husbandry, all they need to do is get out of position. If they do, immediately stop what you are doing, ask for a well known behaviour and reward that. You don't want the dog to feel coerced for the treat. Then give them a break. By teaching the dog all they have to do is disengage, they will hopefully never feel the need to escalate to showing aggression.

Co-operative care may sound difficult, but it is worth putting in the effort into this style of care. Building trust in husbandry increases the trust your dog will have in you in general. If nothing else, you may end up saving money that you may have had to spend on sedation!

