



Easily put an End to Undesirable Behaviors

By Maureen Ross, MA

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Shoot the Dog by Karen Pryor: This definitely works. You will never have to put up with a particular behavior again. This is capital punishment. Examples of simple, more common human versions of behavioral approaches: Spouse habitually comes home in a bad mood / divorce; Cat gets on the kitchen table / keep the cat outdoors or get rid of it; Lazy employee / fire him. You get the picture. It is “extreme measures.” It teaches absolutely nothing about the behavior. If you haven’t read Karen Pryor’s [Don’t Shoot the Dog](#), you should. It is a gift to anyone wanting to learn more about training anyone. There are better ways to change and teach behaviors.

Before I give you the easy way to shape and / or change any behavior, let’s explore three methods that are STILL often used to stop behavior, and usually leave us feeling like ogres, and almost never stop undesirable behaviors forever.

Punishment: Humans still love punishment, in spite of the fact that it is almost never effective, long term, unless brutal. Example: Suppose we punish a child, dog or employee for a behavior and the behavior occurs again. The punishment isn’t working. What now? Usually, we escalate the intensity of the punishment. A scold becomes a slap; a leash jerk becomes a death grip, an employee gets demoted or fired. Punishment will work if it is instantaneous and impactful (packs a punch). If it isn’t expeditious, the dog will not connect the punishment to the act. S/he will connect you to the punishment. Not good for the relationship. Example: If you catch your Labrador Retriever chasing rabbits, call him, he comes and you punish him, the dog has no way of knowing which particular recent activity he is being reprimanded for. Chasing rabbits, playing, running, coming to you when you called; which one ... take your pick. Dogs will become fearful of coming to you. Punishment can seriously damage the relationship between owner and dog. AND, if the behavior is enjoyed by the dog, like retrieving, chasing or being with you, then this behavior will likely happen again, but out-of-sight of the owner, due to anxiety. Now you are dealing with a fearful, anxious dog who doesn’t like you very much.

Negative Reinforcement: A negative reinforcement is any unpleasant event or stimulus, no matter how mild that can be halted or avoided by changing one’s behavior. A cow in a field with an electrified fence touches her nose to the fence, feels the shock, and pulls back, which stops the shock. A dog who gets shocked near flags (invisible fencing) will avoid flags. The difference between NR and punishment is that a negative reinforcement, like a positive one, can be “turned off” by a subject’s behavioral change. Another example is water pistols. A dog jumps on the counter, you squirt it. That’s funny with Newfoundlands who love water. Do it again! A frown, correction, time-out used at appropriate times is an example of NR. The trick to keeping NR effective is learning when to STOP – that is -- when the subject’s behavior improves even slightly.

Extinction: letting the behavior go away by itself: Extinction refers to a behavior that dies down through lack of reinforcement. Behavior that produces NO results will probably extinguish. We often reinforce behavior we wish would extinguish: a barking dog, a crying child. Examples of Extinction: Spouse habitually in a bad mood / ignore him; dog barks / ignore the barking until it stops. When it stops PRAISE, good shush. Be mindful, that extinguishing behavior does work, but it does not give



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quick results. You generally get an intensity (extinction burst) of the behavior before it ceases. Ex: Dog will bark more, then stop; child will holler more, then tire out and stop.

Positive Reinforcement: By far the easiest and most user-friendly (for dog and human) approach is PR. How much easier can it get, especially with a puppy, to teach the behaviors you want and reward them? Look for the behaviors you want and reward them TOO. Focus and visualize what you want your dog to do. If it is realistically possible for the dog, then reinforce (reward) the best offers of that behavior. Your dog lies down all the time. Praise with a “good down and give them a treat.” Chewing something they shouldn’t, say leave-it, and give them something they can chew. CHEW THIS, NOT THAT. This the same for almost all behaviors.

Lazy Easy Training that can change most negative behaviors to positive ones!

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1. **Awareness:** Being aware of the behaviors you don’t like is key. Making a commitment to be patient, compassionate and consistent in changing these behaviors is necessary. How much does it really bother you? Not much if you keep giving it permission to stress you out.
2. **Prevention and Management:** Prevent the undesirable behavior from being reinforced again and again. Example: Your dog jumps on you, then others, and you allow it to happen. Teach a sit. The door is open when the school bus arrives, every day, and the dog is standing in the door barking. Close the door until you have time to teach quite after 3-barks.
3. **Teach the behavior you want:** What do you want the dog to do, when, where and what time. Set boundaries for others to do the same. Be prepared to take three steps forward, two steps back, but ALWAYS one step ahead. You will make mistakes, so will your dog, friends and family. The benefit is that you will learn from them too.

If you feed your dog 2X a day, you have 14 training opportunities every week to teach behaviors that you want ...

Train an incompatible behavior: This is useful for people and pets. One brilliant method is to simply train the dog to perform another behavior that is physically incompatible with the one you don’t want! A dog cannot jump if they are consistently taught to sit in front of humans! A dog cannot beg at the kitchen table if they lie down in the doorway, on their dog napper, or behind a baby gate. Training an incompatible behavior is useful in modifying your own behavior, especially when dealing with emotional states such as grief, anxiety and stress: dancing, singing, laughing with a friend, exercising, yoga, walking the dogs. You cannot engage in them and wallow in misery simultaneously any more than you can drink a full cup of coffee while doing jumping jacks.

Put the behavior on cue, and then you never give the cue. This is the porpoise/dolphin trainer’s most effective method of getting rid of unwanted behavior. It is the axiom of learning theory that when a behavior is brought under stimulus control (when the organism learns to offer the behavior in response to some kind of cue) the behavior tends to extinguish in the absence of the cue. For



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example: Dog barks -- train the dog to bark on cue -- “speak” for a reward. Teach them volume control with “whisper.” Barking at the UPS truck? Toss a deliciously stuffed Kong into the other room.

Shape the absence of the behavior: Reinforce anything and everything that is not the undesired behavior. Focus on reinforcing / shaping / rewarding the desired behavior. This is a good way to turn disagreeable relatives into agreeable relatives too. Dog barks, wait for quiet and reward. Dog sits, give him his dinner or a treat. Children stops complaining reward with a healthy treat. Mother-in-Law complains ... listen with uh hah, I see, well, well ... when the conversation lightens up or she happens to ask how you are, reinforce with more attention. I usually yawn, change the subject or excuse myself to bathroom hoping she’ll forget about me.

Change the motivation: Eliminating the motivation for a behavior is often the most gentle, fundamental and effective method of all, especially for multi-tasking Moms. Changing any behavior takes time. If you don’t have any or are stressed out already, then be wise. Some behaviors are self-reinforcing. The very performance of the behavior is the reinforcement / gratification. Dog is bored, so explores the garbage. You have a choice here. Change the motivation and/or prevention. If you have time for situational set-ups, you can train LEAVE-IT. Otherwise, cover the garbage can or remove it.”

To change motivation, you need to make an accurate estimate of what the motivation is. Humans can be incompetent at that. Behaviors happen quickly, from the dog’s mind, not ours. The trick in any circumstance whether with human or dog behavior is to identify the motivation, rather than jump to conclusions. Notice what actually helps to change the behavior. If dogs are given all they can eat, whether they earn it or not, they are highly unlikely to work for food rewards. If you were stuffed, would you want to go out for pizza? If dogs are allowed to play non-stop or have two dozen meaningless toys, neither will motivate them to come-on-recall nor fetch a dumb-bell. If your partner is watching sports and you are standing there naked on Valentine’s Day with a rose in your teeth, then pull the plug out the socket.

High Ranking Motivators: Discover what your dog’s high-ranking motivators are and you have a trump card to training what you want in a timely manner. Don’t overuse these motivators. Keep high ranking (value) items put away, and use them wisely like when arriving home. Have your dog find his “stuffy.” It will teach her to greet you with something in her mouth, not jump, but sit. Other high ranking motivators: food, Frisbee, balls, stuffed toys, booda ropes and YOUR personal attention.

Good motivational and/or life rewards: Tactile (massage, touching, belly-rubs), exercise (daily walks, playing with other dogs). Tired dogs seldom wreak havoc days or bark all night (they sleep). Dog Sports are an excellent way to balance and redirect energy into positive outlets. Willy-nilly exercise and throwing continuous balls to retrieve isn’t going to teach your dog much but running around. It will expend energy, but even better, play with control. Have them get it, sit, drop-it or give-it.

Mantra: Do something for me and I’ll do something for you. Enjoy the Journey!
