

# The Three Steps of Behaviour Modification



## Step 1. Management - do this FIRST!

### A. Non-Fearbased Behaviours

Management here means to not put the dog into any situation in which he or she is able to practice the misbehaviour. For example, if the puppy chews shoes, put the shoes in the closet.

### B. Fear-based Behaviours

Management here means protecting the dog from uncontrolled fear triggers so that his fears are not made worse. Protecting him successfully meant that he does not react (with barking, growling, lunging, fleeing, or other fear-based behaviours).

When you are unable to supervise your dog, you need to keep him safe from himself and his fears, and prevent him from practicing the undesirable behaviour. Crate or otherwise contain your dog until you have time to supervise him. Do not, however, use the crate as a "baby-sitter" – the crate does not excuse you from your responsibility to provide your dog with adequate and appropriate mental and physical stimulation on a daily basis!

## Step 2. Identify and Remove the Reward

*(for non-fear based behaviours, and ONLY IF/WHEN your MANAGEMENT fails)*

or

## Implement a Classical Counter-Conditioning Programme

*(for fear-based behaviours)*

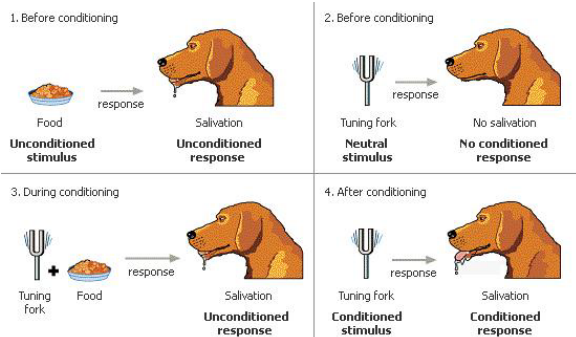
### A. Non-Fearbased Behaviours

When dealing "mis-behaviours", we need to identify and remove the reinforcement that has until now sustained the behaviour. For example, attention is the reinforcement for jumping up, so remove your attention, immediately and every time the dog jumps up. Food is the reinforcement for counter-surfing, so make sure that all food is removed from the counters at all times.

### B. Fear-Based Behaviours

When dealing with behaviours based in fear, the second step is Classical Counter-conditioning.

The principle of classical conditioning can be illustrated as follows:



By pairing the sound of the tuning fork with food, the dog eventually comes to associate the sound of the tuning fork with food, and responds with salivation. The same principle is used to reverse a fear response to a stimulus, such as when the dog reacts fearfully by barking at a strange person or dog, eventually making the dog turn to you for food in response to seeing the strange person or dog, reacting with anticipation of food rather than with fear.

Because the "trigger" elicits a fear-response (such as barking), rather than no response, we are talking about classical counter-conditioning (countering the fear response).

In real life, this means that EVERY TIME one of your dog's fear triggers appear (e.g. another dog, person, noise, etc), you immediately give your dog treats. Keep giving treats for as long as the trigger is present in the environment, irrespective of your dog's reaction or lack thereof. It is the presence of the trigger that causes you to feed your dog. When the trigger disappears, the food stops.

### **Step 3. Teach an Incompatible Behaviour - THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP**

#### A. Non-Fearbased Behaviours

**THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP. We teach the dog an incompatible behaviour** (like for example sitting) and **reinforce that behaviour extensively** with our attention, with treats, etc. WHENEVER it occurs, particularly in situations away from the situations where the dog normally jumps up. This may sound counter-intuitive, but you need to build up a solid reinforcement history for sitting, in all kinds of situations, before you can expect your dog to sit in the situation where he or she would normally jump up.

You must become very adept at IMMEDIATELY reinforcing AS MANY SITS as you can possibly catch, whenever and wherever they occur, until sitting becomes your dog's preferred means of getting your attention. Once the dog learns that sitting gets your attention more than jumping up/whining/scratching/etc. does, i.e. you have built up enough reinforcement history for sitting so that it outweighs the old reinforcement history for jumping up, your dog will choose to sit instead of jumping up all by himself! And you don't have to ask him to sit; your dog will make that choice for himself.

An increased ability for self control should be developed through a combination of management (preventing putting your dog in situations that he or she cannot handle), removal of rewards associated with inappropriate behaviours, a significant increase in mental stimulation throughout the day, and appropriate amounts of exercise (not too much, not too little).

For non-fear based behaviours, this involves teaching behaviours that will replace the undesirable (and no longer reinforced) behaviours, for example sitting instead of jumping up, as discussed above. This should be done separately from step 2 (identify and remove the reinforcer), but it can be done during the same time period.

#### B. Fear-Based Behaviours

**AGAIN, THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP.** For fear-based behaviours, this involves teaching behaviours that will give your dog something to do and to concentrate on instead of worrying about the things that scare him/her. A dog that has nothing else to do will be likely to revert back to the old behaviours (barking, lunging, etc). This is why this third step is critically important. Remember, however, that your dog will not be able to do these new, learned behaviours (e.g. sit, hand-touch, go to his bed or crate) until the emotional response has been changed and the trigger no longer causes a reactive outburst.

This training of incompatible behaviours should be done separately from step 2 (Identify & Remove the Reward, or counter-conditioning), but it can be done during the same time period, away from the dog's triggers.

#### **- BEWARE!**

You may have heard or seen on television that you "have to correct" bad behaviour, or that you must be "dominant" over your dog and be your dog's "alpha". This is not true. These old theories have been debunked by modern science. To find out more about this, go to <https://cowichancanine.ca/tips>.

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