

VOLUME 10  
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# The Whole



# Dog Journal™

A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

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# Seeing Is Believing

*Some healing arts are difficult to explain.*

BY NANCY KERNS

Seventeen years ago, when I was editing a California horse magazine, I received a proposal for a column from a writer with an interest in holistic care for horses. Judging from the samples of her past published work that she included with her proposal, Diana Thompson was a very good writer with in-depth knowledge of horses and a wide variety of holistic treatments. As excited as I was about the prospect of working with this writer, I had to laugh at *some* of her proposed topics. I mean, come on! Massage and acupuncture is one thing, but Reiki? Homeopathy? Flower essences? Animal communicators? Sheesh!

It didn't happen overnight, but in the five years that she wrote the column for me, Diana sold me on those topics and many more, including some that seemed even more far out. In the beginning, it was Diana's competence at using some of these techniques on horses in our photo shoots that opened my eyes. Frequently we would find ourselves in a stable somewhere with a horse, with Diana demonstrating the techniques she had written about, and me trying to take pictures of an impatient or unruly equine model. Diana would calmly assess the situation, apply acupressure to a few points on the horse, mist him with flower essences, and before I knew it, the formerly fidgety or feisty horse would be calmly standing before us with big, soft eyes and a pliant, sleepy new attitude.

Later, I was influenced by letters we received from readers, thanking us for helping them foster stronger and better working relationships with their horses – and even, occasionally, thanking us for saving their

horses lives with a supplement, an herbal remedy, a homeopathic treatment, or some other alternative or complementary treatment they had read about in Diana's column.

Eventually, that column developed into its own magazine, *Whole Horse Journal*, which Diana founded and sold to Belvoir Media Group. I left my original job and went to work for Diana, then for Belvoir, and later took the helm of Belvoir's brainchild, *Whole Dog Journal*. The horse magazine was discontinued after five years of publication, but after 11 years WDJ is still going strong. (So is Diana, incidentally. She's been working for years on a magnificent book about acupressure for horses, which will be published this year. See [handsonhorsecare.com](http://handsonhorsecare.com) for more information.)

I've learned about some pretty far out holistic healthcare practices while editing WDJ, and I must say that the modalities that employ some form of "energy medicine" are the most difficult to describe or to believe in. Starting in this issue, longtime contributor CJ Puotinen will be trying her hand at describing a number of these healing tools; she already firmly believes in them, having used a good many of them on her dogs, herself, and her husband over the years. I've used a few of them, too, and all I can say is that sometimes, when used as part of a holistic healthcare program, they really work. But you might have to see it to believe it.



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**MISSION STATEMENT:** WDJ's mission is to provide dog guardians with in-depth information on effective holistic healthcare methods and successful nonviolent training. The methods we discuss will endeavor to do no harm to dogs; we do not advocate perpetrating even minor transgressions in the name of "greater good." We intend our articles to enable readers to immediately apply training and healthcare techniques to their own dogs with visible and enjoyable success. All topics should contribute to improving the dog's health and vitality, and deepening the canine/human bond. Above all, we wish to contribute information that will enable consumers to make kind, healthy, and informed decisions about caring for their own dogs.

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# On Guard?

*How to reduce, eliminate, or better yet, prevent resource-guarding.*

BY LISA RODIER

**E**ver had a dog who won't give you his bone or toy if you try to take it from him? Or one who gets uncomfortable or growls if you get close to him when he's eating? Or snaps at you if he's on the sofa and you want him off? Or lifts his lip in a snarl if your friend tries to get close to you?

Answer yes to *any* of the above, and you've successfully diagnosed your dog as having a guarding issue. The catch-all, technical term is "resource-guarding," and can include guarding of food bowls (or food), places (crate, dog bed, sofa, etc.), items (rawhide, bones, balls, tissues, etc.) and less commonly, people.

Resource-guarding simply means that a dog gets uncomfortable when we (or other humans) are around him when he has "his stuff." He's nervous that we're going to take it away, so he tries to warn us off in a variety of ways, ranging from simply consuming his food faster, to an all-out bite.

Although resource-guarding appears to be more prevalent in certain breeds or

classes of dogs, it can appear in literally any dog, including that sweet Papillion that lives down the street, or the goofy Golden Retriever who greets you happily on your morning walks.

It's important to recognize, identify, modify, or at least manage this behavior because a dog who is repeatedly pushed or punished in these situations is highly likely to eventually bite. Sure, it might be *you* that he bites, but it could also be your child, your neighbor's child, your boss, or your grandmother. Children are most apt to be at risk for a number of reasons. They tend to disregard warnings to "leave the dog alone" when he's eating or has a toy; they frequently fail to notice the dog's warning signs (stiffening, growling); and they are closer to the ground, so if the dog decides to bite, most likely the child's face will bear the brunt of the attack.

## Nature or nurture?

Resource-guarding "is a perfectly normal survival skill that allows smaller, weaker, and lower-status dogs to keep possession

## What you can do . . .

- Closely observe your dog; what is he telling you with his body language and voice?
- Set up your resource-guarding dog for success by managing his environment and preventing access to his most-guarded items. Keep his stress level low and prevent him from practicing undesirable behaviors.
- Begin a behavior modification program, or seek help from a qualified, positive trainer.



Many shelters and trainers use a tool called an "Assess-A-Hand," a fake hand on a stick, to test dogs for resource-guarding. This dog is clearly a food-guarder.

of a highly valued object even when that object is the target of a larger and stronger dog's desire," says Pat Miller, a trainer, Certified Dog Behavior Consultant, and WDJ Training Editor. In her book, *The Power of Positive Dog Training*, Miller notes that, "Natural behavior or not, resource-guarding is a serious problem when it results in open aggression, especially toward humans."

In the wild, "a group-hunting carnivore would have reproductive advantage over one who gladly relinquishes. It's a good trait, like a well-developed immune system or legs that can run fast," says canine behavior expert Jean Donaldson, in her highly educational book, *Mine!* (devoted solely to the topic of resource-guarding). Of course, she adds, "In a domestic environment, it is undesired."

Sarah Kalnajs, trainer and Certified Dog Behavior Consultant, describes resource-guarding as having both nature (genetic) and nurture (upbringing) components. A dog might be genetically inclined



to guard, but depending how much he is allowed to practice the behavior throughout his life also contributes to the severity of the problem.

Resource-guarding from other dogs is a much more “acceptable” or natural behavior in terms of a dog’s ability to cohabitate with humans. It can certainly lead to big problems, and should not be dismissed, but for the time being, our discussion will focus on guarding from humans. *Note: A dog who guards from other dogs will not necessarily resource-guard from humans.*

## What’s your type?

“Food-guarding” seems to be the most common kind of canine guarding behavior, and is present if the dog “threatens” or bites when:

- Approached while eating from his bowl
- The owner tries to take back a food item the dog has grabbed
- Approached after he finds some kind of food item in the gutter or on the street

“Some dogs may be compulsive, guarding all food items and even an empty dish,” says Donaldson, but she also notes, “The majority will guard only when actually in possession of sufficiently motivating food.” The fact that a dog does not guard a particular food (say, a Milk Bone) does not rule him out as a guarder. It just might not be worthy enough to him as, say, a chicken wing. The only way to determine whether a dog will guard a particular highly motivating food item is to test whether you can readily take that item when the dog has it.

With “object-guarding,” the extent of guarding is dependent upon the value of the object *to the dog*. Items can include, but are certainly not limited to, bones, rawhides, pig ears, favorite toys/balls, laundry items, tissues, wrappers and other garbage, sticks, and/or any “forbidden” objects the dog happens to pick up – which are made more valuable by extreme owner reaction, such as chasing the dog around the room to get the item back, or screeching at the dog to give the item up. While some trainers classify bones, rawhides, pig ears, and edible garbage as “objects,” Pat Miller classifies them as food as the dog’s intent is to eat them; therefore, she classifies the dog’s behavior as food-guarding.

As with food-guarding, the dog may show signs of guarding simply when a person is in the vicinity, as the person approaches, and/or if the person tries to take the object from him. It is very common that a dog won’t want something unless you want it.

“Location-guarding” is also common in modern, dog-loving households. This would describe the following:

- A dog who does not allow owner or spouse into the bedroom or on the bed once the dog is on the bed
- A dog who is grumpy if jostled while on furniture, or when someone tries to move him
- A dog who threatens passersby while he’s in his crate, car, or favorite rest spot



**The contrast between this Chihuahua’s diminutive size and his car-guarding ferocity amuses passers-by, who sometimes tease him – which aggravates the problem.**

The severity of resource-guarding depends upon the value of the item, and who is approaching. In the case of location-guarding, the dog might allow “the wife” on the bed, but not her husband.

“Owner-guarding” seems to occur fairly frequently when *other dogs* are present. Occasionally, however, the dog will guard his person if the dog is on leash with the person, or near her. Some people interpret this as “protectiveness.”

Pat Miller differentiates these behaviors. “A good ‘protection’ dog recognizes a legitimate threat to his person and acts to deter the threat, or waits for instructions from the human to act. A dog who is ‘guarding’ his person – in the sense

of resource-guarding – covets his owner as a possession that he’s not willing to share with other dogs, or sometimes other humans. He sees the approaching dog/person as a threat to his enjoyment of his resource, rather than a physical threat to the person.”

Owner-guarding can also become somewhat muddled if the owner has in his possession some resource – food or a bone, for example – that is valuable to the dog. He may react if his human carries treats or a bait bag. In this case, what, really, is the dog guarding: item or owner?

Trainer Virginia Broitman notes that many dogs who guard their owners are actually very insecure, and might feel empowered to act out *because* their humans are there. Or, the dog is on leash and cannot escape, so he resorts to an impressive display to keep the stranger away. Were

he without his handler, or not on leash, we might see a different reaction.

## Stay positive

You’ve shouted “No!” You’ve stomped your foot. You’ve used a physical correction. But your dog still freezes and growls when you get near him when he’s eating or when he has his “stuff.” What can you do?

First, you need to understand that shouting, stomping, and using physical corrections on the dog will only make matters worse.

I recently saw video footage of a trainer working with a large, young dog who had a history of guarding his food bowl. Over time, the owners had tried a variety of approaches: yelling at the dog, leaning over him while he ate and yelling, hand feeding, and petting the dog while he ate. Unfortunately, the owner reported that the dog had become reactive to the owner when the owner was at a greater and greater distance from the guarded food. And when the owner tried “dominance” — in which he stood over the dog while the dog ate and “made” him do things for his food, then physically reprimanded the dog for being aggressive – the owner got bitten.

While the footage was stellar – the

# How Bad Is It?

During resource-guarding, dogs exhibit components of ritualized aggression. That is, they have a fairly explicit hierarchy of warnings – accelerated eating, cessation of eating or “freezing up,” glassy/hard eyes, growling, lip lifting, snapping, biting – that they’ll run through to get a competitor (YOU!) to back away from what they have. They’re nervous that you’re there and don’t want to share.

Trainers and behaviorists take these warnings and apply a rating scale, ranging from reactions that pose no risk to humans to those that are extremely serious. These descriptions, below, are written primarily with food- or item-guarding in mind, but the same sort of warnings and escalation can be seen with place- or person-guarding. This information is compiled from Jean Donaldson, Pat Miller, and Sarah Kalnajs, describing a dog’s reaction when a person approaches.

## LEVEL 1: DON’T WORRY, I’M HAPPY!

- Relaxed and happy and wants attention, and does not perceive you as a threat.
- Stops eating or engaging with the resource and approaches you.



## LEVEL 2: I SEE YOU

- Looks at you, wags his tail, but keeps eating.
- Still fairly relaxed with you around.
- If given an item, will lie down with it where he is.

## LEVEL 3: I SAID, I KNOW YOU’RE THERE

- Slight tensing of body as you approach.
- Speed of tail wag and tension in body increases as you approach; you’re starting to make him nervous!

## LEVEL 4: GRANITE RABBIT

- Becomes still or freezes, often almost imperceptibly.
- If the dog was chewing, he stops chewing; if the dog was eating, he stops eating, but does not abandon the resource.
- Glassy-eyed stare accompanies a cessation of activity. The stare is rarely aimed at the approaching threat; many owners report a spaced-out, detached-looking expression. This can be an extremely subtle sign that many people miss.

## LEVEL 5: I HAVE TO FINISH THIS BEFORE YOU TAKE IT



- Discomfort with your proximity increases and behavior escalates.
- If the dog was eating, he will eat faster, often “punching” at the food with his muzzle.
- If chewing, he chews faster and more intensely.

- Pushes face into bowl, his body tense, and/or tail tucked, with an exaggerated guarding posture (rear end up high, front end low, covering resource in a stiff and still manner).
- Freezes, glares, shows “whale eye” (head slightly turned away but eyes turning toward his focus so that whites show), or lip lift.

## LEVEL 6: I’M WARNING YOU, DON’T TAKE IT!

- A low rumbling growl might be presented on its own, or in combination with other threats. It may or may not be protracted. Can be very quiet!
- Might carry the item under a chair, bed, or to his crate, then growl as you approach.
- Might try to push food bowl away from you.

## LEVEL 7: THIS IS GONNA GET UGLY

- Snarl, exposing teeth by vertically retracting lips. This may occur before, after or in conjunction with other threats (i.e., growl and snarl, together).

## LEVEL 8: CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

- Aggressive tooth display, and disengages from the food bowl or resource and snaps.
- Little or no contact, no punctures, but dog is telling you he is not willing to share with you. (Note: Donaldson describes a snap as “an air bite; dog deliberately misses.” She reports that people often say that the dog tried to bite them, but they were able to move away quickly enough. Donaldson says, “This is unlikely, as a geriatric, couch-potato dog has a reaction time better than an Olympic athlete. When dogs intend to bite, they bite. When they intend to snap, they snap.”)

## LEVEL 9: I DON’T KNOW HOW ELSE TO TELL YOU

- Dog bites without breaking skin (has good bite inhibition).



## LEVEL 10: DANGER!

- Dog bites; contact is quick, hard, and most likely will break skin.
- Typically bites multiple times, and might consist of punctures moving up the person’s arm or face.

This is a rough guide to determine the seriousness of the issue. Some dogs haven’t read the rule book, and might not move neatly through the hierarchy, leaping, for example, from a growl directly to a bite. A dog can move through this hierarchy quickly – in seconds – and might exhibit signs so subtle that we miss them completely.

Nevertheless, trainers often hear the cry, “He bit without warning!” More often than not, there was a warning, somewhere, sometime – we just missed it.

camera caught all of the dog's warnings superbly – the method that the trainer recommended for dealing with the problem was not. Instead of using behavior modification, which has the potential to make the dog safe around anyone, the trainer elected to use force and physical corrections using a choke chain to “show the dog that the people were in charge.”

The trainer advised the couple to approach the bowl with the dog on leash and physically correct the dog for lunging toward the bowl or showing any signs of aggression (guarding), then “make” the dog sit about a foot away from the food. Once the dog was “calm,” he was allowed to eat, remaining on leash with the owner. If the dog showed any aggression, the handler was to physically correct the dog and yank him away from the food bowl, wait for the dog to “calm down,” then start again.

There are several problems with this approach. First, the couple hoped to one day have children, and this “method” taught the dog nothing about interacting with someone who didn't have a leash and the strength to make a physical correction. In addition, the trainer repeatedly triggered a reaction from the dog. Behavior experts agree that, in contrast to the approach used in the video, successful behavior modification works at a sub-threshold level, at a low-enough level of intensity to prevent the dog from reacting. Also, the trainer also did nothing to address the dog's emotional state (nervous, insecure, and stressed) and

instead intensified it; what was defined as “calm” was anything but.

It's possible to suppress guarding behavior using force, says Pat Miller. “However, you haven't changed the dog's emotional response to a threat to his resource, just his physical response. It's quite possible that the guarding behavior will return if and when he feels too threatened, or is approached by someone that he doesn't perceive as capable of overpowering his desire for his resource.

“Any time you use force, you risk escalating the level of violence rather than modifying the behavior. You may not know until you've done significant behavioral damage that your dog is one who escalates, rather than shuts down, in the presence of violence.”

Here's another dire scenario: If your dog growls at you over his food bowl and you punish or challenge him in some way, it might very well occur to him that his growl wasn't sufficient to warn you off. He may resort to the next warning level – a snarl, snap, or worse – in an effort to more effectively protect his food.

### **Behavior modification: Get to the problem's root**

Experts agree that the best route to take in dealing with resource-guarding is to use a combination of management and behavior modification.

Essentially, “management” entails intervening in (or anticipating and preventing) a situation so that the dog cannot

repeat inappropriate behavior. For example, we keep food and toys picked up around a resource-guarder so that he cannot engage in guarding. Management does not necessarily or teach the dog anything; he simply has less opportunity to practice an undesirable behavior.

The most important tools in the behavior-modification toolbox, though, are systematic desensitization and counter-conditioning.

Desensitization involves exposing the dog to whatever it is that previously evoked his fear or anxiety, but at a distance and intensity that *does not produce a response*.

Counter-conditioning is a process in which we replace a dog's involuntary, undesirable reaction (such as fear) with a more desirable response – one that is incompatible with the undesirable old response (such as the eager anticipation of a tasty treat). We create a positive emotional response by associating an event (your approach) with something good (a reward). This methodology has been proven to work, and is relatively easy and pleasant for both human and dog.

With counter-conditioning, you don't exert your “control” over the dog in any way, but instead, transform your presence around the dog's possessions into a signal that even better things are coming. One event becomes a reliable predictor of another event, and the subject develops an anticipatory response to the first event. By pairing good things (extra scrumptious treats) with the formerly bad thing (your approach or presence near whatever he is guarding), your proximity starts to become a better thing – a predictor of what is to come (treats!).

## **It Has Nothing to Do With Dominance!**

Remember, resource-guarding is a *normal* canine behavior – and a highly adaptive trait in a natural environment. “If dogs had to fend for themselves tomorrow, guarders would have the survival and reproductive edge over non-guarders,” says Donaldson. This has nothing whatsoever to do with a “dominant” or “pushy” personality in the dog.

As proof of this point, be aware that many dogs respond well to desensitization and counter-conditioning, and either stop guarding or reduce their guarding behaviors. If the dog stops guarding, does that mean we have made him less dominant by using these techniques? Donaldson notes that many dogs who guard have other problems such as submissive urination, shyness, or lack of confidence, which all are “diametrically opposed to the concept that the dog is overly assertive.”

The fact is, many “aggressive” canine behaviors are triggered by fear or anxiety (“She's gonna take away my bowl!”), both of which cause an increase in adrenaline and stress hormones. Punishing your dog for resource-guarding can cause him to stop giving warnings altogether, or strengthen the behavior. His underlying emotion (“I wish she would stay away from my bed!”) remains. Instead of growling, he'll just bite without warning.

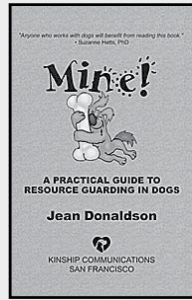


**Anxiety and insecurity, not aggression or dominance, lies at the root of most resource-guarding problems.**



## Buy This Book!

Anyone involved in rescue or who has a resource-guarder should have a copy of Jean Donaldson's, *Mine! A Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs*, in his or her library. A paperback, the book is available for \$13 from DogWise (dogwise.com or 800-776-2665) or your local bookseller.



The goal is to transform a food-guarder who becomes tense or upset when a person approaches him while he's eating into a dog who is happy to be approached while eating, as this reliably predicts the delivery of even more food or treats.

Donaldson stresses the need to work at a low threshold; if at any point the dog shows the original reaction, you have gone *super-threshold*, and it is necessary to back up and start at a point where the dog does not react. "No good comes of rehearsing the dog's old, growly behavior by replicating super-threshold versions of the trigger. In fact, it can make the dog worse."

Donaldson also makes it clear that when working with a guarder, we need to be sure that the first event (the "threat" to the resource) must come before the delivery of the counter-conditioning treat. For example, in a food bowl exercise, "the approach, bowl touch, or bowl removal must precede the addition of bonuses to the dish." This means that we do not, for example, show a dog the bait in hopes of preventing a guarding reaction. Doing so will not condition the appropriate emotional response.

### Doing the work

Ideally, you start with a young pup who *doesn't* guard and teach him early on that your presence predicts good stuff, says Miller. "You do this by offering to trade something wonderful for whatever he already has – such as a toy of moderate value, to start with – working your way up to really high-value items. I teach a 'Give' cue by saying 'Give,' then offering a high value treat in exchange for his object. Repeat until he will happily give up any object when you ask him to 'Give.'"



**Paws sometimes guards rope toys and Frisbees. Berkeley, California, trainer Sandi Thompson "trades" a low-value toy that Paws has dropped in favor of a high-value treat.**

Trainers use different protocols; there is always more than one way to approach an exercise. The protocol you use should be tailored to your dog, depending on the seriousness of his guarding behavior.

- Pig's ears
- Rawhide chews
- Rope toys
- Balls
- Socks
- Newspapers and magazines

Once the items have been ranked, training begins with the items that the dog *doesn't especially care about and does not want*. Initially, higher value items must not be available to the dog, because we want to prevent him from "practicing" his guarding behavior.

A session begins with the trainer presenting a low-value item to the dog and telling him to "Take it!" Almost immediately, the trainer gives a cue for "Drop it!" and gives the dog an extremely delicious treat." The idea is that the dog is more than happy to "drop" the low-value item in favor of the treat. This exercise would be repeated dozens of times over a number of sessions.

Note: If the trainer is concerned that the dog may act aggressively in order to take the higher-value treat, she should have the dog on a tether, position herself just out of reach, and toss the treats in such a way to most safely reach for the low-value item. Again, in the case of a dog whose guarding behavior rates higher than a four on the scale found on page 5, the services of a qualified, positive canine behavior professional are recommended.

Only when the dog is comfortable with the first step would the protocol change, first by giving the dog the item and walking away, giving him a minute to enjoy the low-value item, and then returning to trade. As long as the dog continues to respond well to these exercises, you would work up to the more valuable items higher on your dog's list. Training would occur in a variety of locations, and from then on, throughout the dog's life, "spot checks" would be instituted to be sure that the dog retained what he learned.

Note: This example is a summary provided only to give the reader an idea as to what is involved in rehabilitating a guarder. If you have a guarder, you will need to follow a more detailed, structured protocol, and may require the assistance

of a qualified behavior professional. See “Finding the Right Trainer,” below.

If your household includes children, you will need to take special precautions. Initially, only the adults should work with a dog who guards; kids should be a part of the guarding-rehabilitation program only after the adults have worked extensively with the dog, and only under *direct supervision* of an adult. Never assume that once your dog stops guarding with you, that he’ll stop guarding his items from the kids.

Similarly, you should never assume that once your dog no longer guards his cherished items from you or your family, he will no longer guard them from other people. Plan, manage, and supervise your dog’s interactions carefully, to prevent any possible harm to other people.

For location-guarding, follow a similar protocol. Start by using a place the dog does not guard and reward him for coming away from/off the place willingly. Donaldson likes to use target training as part of this protocol.

## Manage in the mean time

Guarding behavior can be a daunting challenge to overcome, especially if it has progressed significantly. In this case, you *must* find an experienced trainer/behavior-



**The author’s Bouvier, Axel, used to guard tennis balls. He learned to give them up through “give” and “trade” cues, starting with low-value items.**

ist with whom to work. Until you are able to get help, management is a valid alternative. This involves avoiding the problem or trigger through environmental control. For example, if your dog guards pig ears, remove them from your home and do not allow him access to them. Keep the bed-

room door closed to a bed-guarder.

If there is a “management failure,” and the dog gets on the bed, you can either ignore the dog and wait for him to come off the bed on his own, or, more proactively, redirect him to an alternative activity, such as calling the dog to the kitchen for a cookie or inviting him out for a brief walk.

If your food-guarder ever manages to pick up something that’s dangerous (such as a bar of dark chocolate) or valuable to you (like your prescription glasses), Donaldson advises trying a quick, calm, “bait and switch.” Bribe or distract the dog with anything you can think of. “Although bribery is totally ineffective for fostering actual behavior change, when you’re in a jam, anything goes,” she says. But remember, repeated management failures teach the dog nothing.

Rehabilitation of a resource-guarder takes time and requires patience. But the payoff in the end – for you, your dog, and your friends and family – is well worth the effort. 🐾

*Lisa Rodier became interested in guarding behaviors through her volunteer work in shelters and Bouvier rescue. She lives in Alpharetta, Georgia, with her husband and two Bouviers, and serves on the Board of Advisors for Service Dogs of Virginia, Inc.*

## Finding the Right Trainer

If you have a resource-guarder, you should find a positive trainer with whom to work.

When interviewing prospective trainers, trainer Ali Brown recommends avoiding any “who don’t have a working knowledge of operant conditioning, classical conditioning, positive reinforcement, and negative punishment. Stick with trainers who talk about building working relationships, use a clicker, and avoid choke chains, prong collars, shock collars, shaker cans, spray bottles, or throw chains. The trainer you select should be comfortable with working with resource-guarding; not all trainers are.”

Pat Miller suggests, “To start, look at the listings on websites such as the APDT (Association of Pet Dog Trainers, apdt.com), IAABC (International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, iaabc.com), and the CCPDT (Certification Council for Pet Dog Trainers, ccpdt.com). While not all trainers listed use appropriate non-force methods, it’s a good place to start looking. I have a trainer referral list on my website (peaceablepaws.com), and those trainers are all positive (by my definitions). Ask the trainers exactly what tools and methods they use. Avoid any trainers who use methods designed to cause pain or use intimidation.”

Another good resource for well-educated trainers is the

San Francisco SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers, founded by Jean Donaldson, which maintains a list of trainers taught by Donaldson (see [sfspca.org/academy/index.shtml](http://sfspca.org/academy/index.shtml)). Most graduates of this program are highly qualified to deal with resource-guarding.

The prognosis for a resource-guarder, especially an older dog, depends on a number of factors, including owner compliance, the presence of protracted warning signals (stares, growls, snarls, and snaps), and the degree of the dog’s bite inhibition (ability to control the strength of his bite).

Depending on the level of guarding, rehabilitation can take weeks to months. Trainer Ali Brown says this can depend on many factors, including your consistency; how well you manage the situation; whether you work with a professional, positive trainer; whether you have worked with a problem like this before; how well everyone else in the family manages and trains the dog; whether the dog is under other stressors that can be diminished; and whether there are any medical problems that might contribute to the problem.

“Any behavioral problem has many variables to it,” says Brown. “We can’t control them all, but we can try to control as many as possible to hedge our bets that we’ll see quick progress.”



# Good Energy

*Dozens of healing modalities aim to affect and improve the patient's energetic fields. We describe the most frequently used methods.*

BY CJ PUOTINEN

**W**e call it the spark of life for good reason. From birth to death, all living creatures generate and transmit energy.

Entire healing therapies, some of them thousands of years old, have been built around energy. Once dismissed by Western science as impossible or ridiculous – and still viewed with suspicion by conventional physicians and veterinarians – energy medicine is slowly gaining acceptance in the United States. Several energy therapies are taught in American universities or are used by a growing number of healthcare practitioners. Can energy therapies help your dog? The descriptions and resources provided here may help you decide.

## We're electric

All living beings generate and transmit electricity. Medical doctors measure it with electroencephalograms (EEGs) and electro-



**Acupuncture is the oldest and best-known energy medical treatment. Many dogs, like this 10-year-old Labrador Retriever, receive regular acupuncture treatments to relieve the pain and stiffness caused by arthritis.**

## What you can do . . .

- Read a book, take a class, watch a DVD, or consult an energy healing practitioner.
- Use energy medicine as a support therapy to enhance conventional or alternative treatment.
- Discuss energy therapies with your veterinarian.
- Use energy techniques to strengthen and improve your relationship with your dog.
- Keep an open mind; anything is possible!



cardiograms (ECGs or EKGs). Scientists routinely describe the nervous system in electrical terms, referring to its transducers, transmitters, electrochemical potential circuitry, current, resistance, voltage, capacity, and charge. The brain contains billions of neurons, which are cells that communicate using electrical signals and chemical messengers called neurotransmitters. The connections between neurons (called synapses) measure electrical impulses and transmit the neuron-to-neuron messages that are the foundation of brain function. Everything about the physiology, chemistry, and electrical circuitry of the nervous system has become fodder for medical research!

But Western medicine only maps and measures the body's electrochemical output. When it attempts to change, balance, or improve the system, it almost always does so with invasive procedures, prescription drugs, or devices like surgically

implanted pacemakers. In contrast, energy healing techniques can detect and correct energy imbalances in a noninvasive manner. Practitioners perceive these energy imbalances as the root cause of disease and discomfort.

Some types of energy medicine require the use of special equipment, such as acupuncture needles or grounding technology; in other systems, energetically charged substances, such as homeopathic remedies and flower essences, are used to correct energy imbalances. In some systems, practitioners employ physical touch, such as acupuncture, meridian tapping techniques, applied kinesiology, and the laying on of hands; in others, the practitioners work close to the patient but do not use physical touch; in still others, the techniques are performed at a distance from the patient.

Skeptics dismiss any benefits observed from energy healing as a result of the pla-

cebo effect – where any observable health improvements cannot result from treatment but are attributed to the patient’s beliefs, hopes, and suggestibility. Psychology is a powerful force, but when *canine* patients improve overnight, their belief in the benefits of a specific therapy is an unlikely explanation for their improvement!

Some critics warn that the use of energy techniques can delay diagnosis, interfere with proper medical treatment, or create complications. However, most energy practitioners consider themselves part of the patient’s therapeutic team, not the sole healthcare provider, and they recommend appropriate veterinary care. In fact, some energy practitioners accept new patients only if they have been referred by a veterinarian. And a growing number of veterinarians administer energy healing techniques themselves, or work with energy practitioners.

Energy techniques are often used as support therapies. Learning how to use one or more of these methods may help both you and your dog in emergencies, and they may improve the outcome of veterinary treatment. Best of all, if an energy technique doesn’t work – and nothing works for everyone – it’s extremely unlikely to cause harm.

Occasionally a study involving an aspect of energy healing, such as the power of prayer, will be published in a major medical journal, but for the most part, research into what science calls the paranormal receives little public attention. Yet in quantum physics and in the field of consciousness research, rigorous scientific experiments have led to fascinating discoveries about the nature of energy and its effect on everything and everyone.

Medical journalist Lynne McTaggart has spent years translating technical scientific literature for lay readers, and her books *The Field: The Quest for the Secret Forces of the Universe* and *The Intention Experiment: Using Your Thoughts to Change Your Life and the World* review and explain the findings of hundreds of scientists. “Hidden within the cautious, neutral language of experimental data and mathematical equations,” she writes, “is nothing less than the makings of a new world, which slowly takes shape for all the rest of us, one painstaking experiment at a time.”

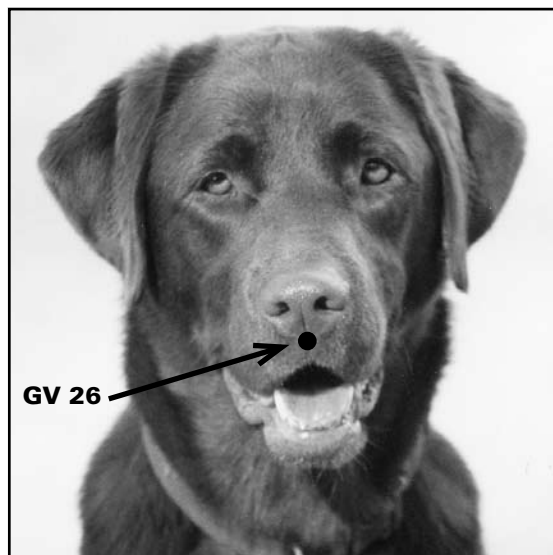
Recent discoveries about the brain

and nervous system, chemical changes in molecules, communication between neurons, remote healing experiments, the power of intention (thought focused for a specific purpose), and other scientific findings explain why so many physicists and medical researchers consider energy healing not only theoretically possible but a fact of life.

## Acupuncture

The most famous of all energy healing techniques is acupuncture, developed more than 5,000 years ago and still a primary healing modality for millions, including dogs, cats, horses, and other animals.

The foundation of acupuncture is a system of invisible channels or meridians through which the body’s energy, or *chi*, flows. Each meridian is linked to a different



**An important acupuncture point for dog owners to know is GV26, which can be strongly stimulated to revive an unconscious animal.**

organ or body part. Blocks or obstructions in meridian energy reflect imbalances or illness in corresponding organs. To repair both problem and patient, key points along affected meridians are stimulated, releasing energy blocks and restoring balance to the body’s energy flow.

Acupuncture points, or acupoints, can be stimulated by the insertion of needles, the application of heat (called moxibustion, in which burning herbs are held just above specific points), acupressure (finger or thumb pressure, massage, or tapping on acupoints), or techniques that utilize electrical or ultrasound stimulation, the implantation of substances such as small gold beads, the application of laser light, or the

application of small adhesive magnets.

The acupuncture needles used for dogs are so thin that their insertion is usually painless, although when first experiencing acupuncture, many dogs soon shake their needles out. In some cases insertion causes a brief, sharp pain or discomfort. People receiving acupuncture have the same reactions. Dogs who receive acupuncture weekly or monthly become accustomed to the procedure and often enjoy it, especially when it relieves their chronic pain.

Stacey Hershman, DVM, who makes house calls in Rockland County, New York, and is certified by the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society (IVAS), uses acupuncture to treat many disorders, especially immune system problems, arthritis, and pain from pre- and post-operative hip and knee surgery. “It also helps with torn ligaments, muscle sprains, panosteitis, hip dysplasia, and partial paralysis due to slipped discs,” says Dr. Hershman.

Acupuncture can also be used to help treat behavioral disorders; skin problems such as allergic dermatitis, hot spots, or lick granulomas; respiratory problems; digestive disorders; reproductive problems; hormonal imbalances; burns and other injuries; and any chronic or acute condition.

The technique does not address symptoms the way conventional medicine does. Instead, it stimulates healing from within, allowing the body to repair itself.

Treatment time varies from 10 seconds to half an hour or more. For a simple acute problem, such as a sprain or infection, a single treatment may be all that’s needed. For established conditions, such as arthritis, one to three treatments per week may be necessary at first.

According to IVAS, “A positive response is usually seen after the first to third treatment. Once a maximum positive response is achieved (usually after four to eight treatments), treatments are tapered off so that the greatest amount of symptom-free time elapses between them.” Most dogs with chronic conditions receive two to four maintenance treatments per year. Canine athletes may benefit from one or two treatments weekly or monthly, depending on their activity level and condition.

Acupuncture’s results are often subtle but they can be dramatic. In his book *Love, Miracles and Animal Healing*, Alan

Schoen, DVM, describes how, shortly after he gave an acupuncture demonstration at a veterinary clinic, technicians rushed into the emergency room with a 12-year-old German Shepherd whose heart had stopped after surgery. The veterinarians on duty inserted a tube down the dog's throat, administered manual cardiac massage, injected the dog with epinephrine and bicarbonate, then wired him to electrodes and gave him electric shocks.

The dog's EKG traced a flat line and he was pronounced dead. A technician was about to disconnect the oxygen when Schoen asked if he could try. He inserted an acupuncture needle at the center of the dog's upper lip, halfway between nose and mouth, and gave it several short jabs. Within seconds, the dog began breathing and his heartbeat resumed.

Dr. Schoen wants everyone to know about this acupuncture point, called GV 26, a point on the Governing Vessel meridian. This emergency point can be stimulated with an acupuncture needle or fingernail to revive an unconscious animal.

Like all energy therapies, acupuncture can be used to alleviate, improve, or cure acute or chronic conditions and to help keep problems from developing when used as a preventive therapy.

## Acupressure

Acupressure utilizes the same meridians as acupuncture, but instead of needles, pressure from the ball of the thumb, the tip of the index or middle finger, or the bent index finger's knuckle (if nails are long) stimulates the meridians' key points.

Acupressure is a versatile healing tool, one that can address obvious problems like sports injuries as well as more complex conditions, like auto-immune disorders or behavioral issues.

Frequent WDJ contributors and acupressure experts Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis, authors of *The Well-Connected Dog: A Guide to Canine Acupressure* and other books, offer introductory, intermediate, and advanced training in Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupressure for horses, dogs, and other animals at their Tallgrass Animal Acupressure Institute in Larkspur, Colorado. Graduate practitioners from Tallgrass span the globe.

In their *Canine Acupressure* workbook, Snow and Zidonis give step-by-step instructions for locating and stimulating about 150 major acupressure points, with treatment programs for commonly seen



**Sabra Learned, a TTouch practitioner from Berkeley, California, uses a TTouch technique called an "ear slide."**

problems, such as lower back soreness, neck stiffness, and hip problems.

While acupuncture needles must be positioned precisely, acupressure is forgiving because fingertips cover a wider area. This noninvasive treatment can safely be learned and used by pet owners as well as by trainers and healthcare practitioners.

Acupressure performed mechanically can clear energy blocks and improve health, but Snow and Zidonis train their students as much in breathing and focusing their thoughts as in the location of meridians and pressure points. "Acupressure has the added benefit of contributing human intention and energy to the dog during the process of balancing physical and emotional issues," says Snow. "In several ways, this makes the acupressure more powerful and effective."

Acupressure sessions typically last 20 minutes to one hour, beginning with opening work (centering yourself, positioning the dog, and gliding the palms over the animal's body), followed by point work (stimulating individual acupressure points), closing (all-over massage with a smooth, light touch), and 5 to 10 minutes of gentle stretching.

"The best part of acupressure," says Snow, "is that it is always available. We have seen many who, even as novices, provided healing help for their animals after learning some basic energy balancing techniques. Not everyone wants to be a practitioner, but everyone can use acupressure to support their dog's physical and emotional well-being."

## Tellington TTouch

When Israeli physicist and athlete Moishe Feldenkrais was hit by a bus and lost the use of his legs, he refused surgery and ignored his doctors' pessimistic predictions. Instead, he re-educated his legs by bypassing the habitual ways in which he moved, utilizing every alternative motion he could discover, from gross muscle movement to the smallest and most subtle flexing. Within two years, he was walking again – and his discoveries improved the lives of those with obvious disabilities as well as dancers, athletes, and people who wanted to enhance their performance. He taught them how to walk, run, speak, think, and move in entirely new ways.

The practitioners he trained in Awareness through Movement or the Feldenkrais Method of Functional Integration spent hundreds of hours lying on the floor, studying and experiencing minute muscle movements.

One of Feldenkrais' students was Linda Tellington-Jones, who realized that horses and other animals could, like people, learn new responses very quickly if their old habit patterns were disrupted in a non-threatening manner. Her method, Tellington TTouch (pronounced tee-touch), has transformed dogs, cats, horses, cows, goats, birds, reptiles, and zoo animals, as well as their owners, companions, and caregivers. Tellington-Jones describes TTouch as affecting living beings at the cellular level, thus activating the body's potential.

TTouch borrows some of its procedures from auricular medicine, an acupuncture technique that stimulates acupoints on the ear to treat the entire body. Additional body touches, small circular movements, lifts, and slides are performed with the hands and fingertips, and dogs are wrapped in elastic bandages, stroked with wands, and walked through labyrinths, all in an effort to interrupt and permanently change their habitual thoughts, reactions, and motions.

TTouch practitioners and instructors use the technique to help dogs overcome fear, improve their coordination, prevent injuries, improve their focus and concentration, and reduce the stress in their lives. The technique has helped dogs overcome separation anxiety, improve obedience, reduce excessive barking and chewing, and diminish aggressive behavior.

Thanks to the many books, videos, DVDs, and training aids created by Linda



Tellington-Jones, anyone with a love of animals can learn TTouch at home. More than 1,000 certified practitioners in the U.S. and 25 other countries provide in-person instruction and treatment sessions.

Now that TTouch has been helping dogs and other animals for almost 25 years, Linda Tellington-Jones has introduced something new – her latest TTouch method, called *TTouch-for-You*, is for people.

## Therapeutic Touch

In the early 1970s, Dolores Krieger, PhD, a registered nurse and professor at the New York University Graduate School of Nursing, and her mentor, Dora Kunz, developed a secular, nonreligious form of healing that combined the laying on of hands – the world's oldest healing method – with other traditional energetic techniques.

The result, which they called Therapeutic Touch, was first taught to nurses at NYU. Today Therapeutic Touch is taught in over 200 hospitals and more than 100 accredited colleges and universities in the United States, as well as in 75 countries around the world.

Best known for its ability to relieve stress and anxiety, Therapeutic Touch has been credited with reducing pain, improving immune function, speeding wound healing, and improving overall health. It has been tested in numerous research studies that document physiological changes within the body, including changes in brain wave patterns.

Despite its name, Therapeutic Touch is a hands-off healing method, for it doesn't involve physical contact. The technique is performed in three main steps.

First, the practitioner centers himself or herself by quieting the mind.

Next, with hands placed two to six inches from the patient, the practitioner scans the patient's body using slow, rhythmic motions to locate energy blocks.

Last, the energy blocks are released as the practitioner visualizes and smoothes the patient's energy field from head to toe. Sessions typically last from 20 to 30 minutes.

Carol Robin, DC, a chiropractor in West Shokan, New York, learned Therapeutic Touch as an adjunct to her professional practice. When she tried it on her dog and three cats, they responded as well as her human patients. She then began teaching Therapeutic Touch and Energy Balancing to pet owners.

"This method is a powerful tool for centering, relaxing, and grounding," she says, "and it helps with behavior problems as well as physical ailments. If dogs are hyper or nervous, it calms them down. If they're afraid of thunderstorms or strange noises, it can help them be less fearful. In cases of injury or illness, it helps them relax and gets their energy flowing more freely to speed up the healing process. I can't think of any condition where Therapeutic Touch would not be helpful."

Dr. Robin's instructions are simple. After relaxing, grounding yourself, and focusing your attention on your dog, place one hand on the head and the other just above the tail at the base of the spine, over the sacrum. Touching lightly with the palms of the hands, or on a small or toy breed, with your fingertips, imagine energy flowing like water from the dog's head, down the spine, and out the end of the tail. Hold the position for a minute or two, until you feel a sense of balance under your hands and the dog begins to relax.

Light strokes from head to tail and from spine to paws distribute the energy throughout the dog's body, clear energy imbalances, and facilitate healing.

"The most important thing to do before you begin," says Dr. Robin, "is to take a few deep breaths and center yourself. If you're upset or distracted, you'll only agitate the dog. If your intention is loving and healing, your efforts will assist your animal companion."

To help those who are unfamiliar with the preliminary steps of Therapeutic Touch, Dr. Robin has recorded guided meditation and imagery CDs. "They're for anyone who would like to relax and explore the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels of body, heart, mind, and spirit," she says, "all of which enhance your application of Therapeutic Touch."

## Reiki

Reiki (pronounced RAY-kee) was developed in Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is taught in an oral tradition of master-to-student instruction. The Reiki practitioner



**Trainer and Reiki practitioner Elizabeth Teal used reiki to help Sam (shown with his new owner, Morgan Jarman) stop panicking at the sound of cars and traffic.**

becomes the conduit for transmitting universal energy to the client's energy field by means of an "attunement" from a Reiki Master. Practitioners usually describe their work as bringing the body into harmony and balance. Reiki is used for all types of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing. In addition to relieving physical symptoms, it enhances personal growth, speeds the healing of injuries, and reduces stress.

In Reiki, intention is everything. Practitioners agree that having the right mental focus is more important than holding your hand in an exact position. So long as your intention is to channel universal energy for the highest good of the person or animal you're working with, the same positive impact will result.

Level 1 Reiki students practice being a conduit of healing energy for themselves and others at close proximity. In Level 2, students learn three ancient symbols that can be used to focus healing, intensify the energy flow, and transmit Reiki across greater distances. Level 2 Reiki is especially useful when working with dogs and other creatures, including wild, aggressive, abused, traumatized, and seriously ill animals. Level 3 produces Reiki Masters, who are the most advanced practitioners.

Only a few formal studies have examined Reiki's effectiveness, and of these, most dealt with pain. Reiki has been shown to be highly effective in managing pain from various causes, including cancer, arthritis, and sinus infections. However, Reiki practitioners report the healing of a wide variety of illnesses. It is one of the world's most widely used energy therapies.

In Orange Park, Florida, dog trainer and behavioral consultant Elizabeth Teal was completing her Level 3 Masters training when she used Reiki to break up a dog fight.

"The two dogs were part of a recently combined family, so they knew each other, but not well," says Teal. "One was a highly spoiled, resource-guarding terrier belonging to the client's mother-in-law. The other was a territorial, defensively aggressive, recently rescued spaniel belonging to the client's child. These dogs did not speak the same language. The kitchen was already crowded when the doorbell rang because both owners were trying to feed their dogs at the same time. Tensions were high. A third person, a visitor, entered the kitchen, and I came in last. Suddenly, all hell broke loose. Everyone was screaming, including the dogs, and blood was flying."

Reiki treatments begin with the practitioner asking permission to proceed, which animals indicate with their posture, breathing, and body language, but this was an emergency. Reiki instructors explain that in emergencies, the higher self of all concerned directs the energy.

"The first thing I did was clear the room," says Teal. "It took a minute to accomplish this, but as soon as the people left, I drew a power symbol and a relationship symbol over the area. The terrier still had a serious hold on the spaniel. I knew that if I put my hands near the dogs, I would be attacked.

"I held my hands to either side of both dogs and focused my mind. What happened next wasn't like a jolt of lightning or an explosion, but I felt a *whoosh*, and a wave of quiet filled the room. At that instant, both dogs stopped, stood still, and stared straight at me. That gave me just enough room to grab their collars, toss them in their crates, and kick the doors closed."

Teal and her client took both dogs to the nearest veterinary clinic, where the spaniel was treated for multiple bite wounds, requiring stitches. The terrier has since been re-homed.

"I'd like to add a note of caution," she says. "Dog fights are very, very serious, and I'm not by any stretch of the imagination suggesting that you learn Reiki because it will break up dog fights. Also, dogs should

never be put in situations where they have to use their weapons. This fight could and should have been prevented, but that's a separate story."

After she completed her Masters training, Teal began working with animals and their human and animal families. "I'm more interested in emotional healing than physical healing," she explains, "and I may specialize in re-homed animals, who often have complex issues. Reiki is the best tool I can imagine for helping these special pets."

For an excellent introduction to Reiki for pets, see *Animal Reiki: Using Energy to Heal the Animals in Your Life*, by Elizabeth Fulton and Kathleen Prasad. 🐾

*Coming next month: Animal communication, applied kinesiology, flower essences, homeopathy, and more.*

*CJ Puotinen, a frequent contributor to WDJ, is the author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care, which describes several energy healing techniques. See "Resources," page 24, for more information.*

## Resources Mentioned in This Article

### RECOMMENDED READING

***The Intention Experiment: Using Your Thoughts to Change Your Life and the World***, by Lynne McTaggart. Free Press, 2007

***The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe***, by Lynne McTaggart. Harper Paperbacks, 2003

### ACUPUNCTURE

**American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association**, Bel Air, MD. Veterinary referrals. (410) 569-0795 or holisticvetlist.com

**International Veterinary Acupuncture Society**, Fort Collins, CO. (970) 266-0666, IVAS.org

**Stacey Hershman, DVM**. naturalvetforpets.com

***Love, Miracles and Animal Healing***, by Allen Schoen, DVM. Simon & Schuster, 1995

### ACUPRESSURE

Tallgrass Animal Acupressure Institute, Larkspur, CO. Books, DVDs, workshops, practitioners. Available from Tallgrass Publishing: ***Canine Landmark Anatomy & Acupoint Energetics***, video/DVD and manual by Turie Norman, DVM, produced by Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis; and ***The Well-Connected Dog: A Guide to Canine Acupressure***, by Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis. Tallgrass Publishing, (303) 681-3033, animalacupressure.com

### TELLINGTON T TOUCH

**Tellington TTouch Training**, Santa Fe, NM. (866) 488-6824, tteam-touch.com

***Getting in TTouch with Your Dog: An Easy, Gentle Way to Better Health and Behavior*** (2001, by Linda Tellington-Jones); ***Getting in TTouch with Your Puppy: A Gentle Approach to Training and Influencing Behavior*** (2007, by Linda Tellington-Jones); ***The Tellington TTouch for Happier, Healthier Dogs*** (2006 DVD by Linda Tellington-Jones); and ***Unleash Your Dog's Potential: Getting in Touch with Your Canine Friend*** (2006 DVD by Linda Tellington-Jones) are all available from Trafalgar Square Publishing, (800) 888-4741 or ipgbook.com

### THERAPEUTIC TOUCH

**Therapeutic Touch**, therapeutictouch.org

**Guided CDs Inc.**, Carol Robin, DC, West Shokan, NY. (800) 657-8119, GuidedCDs.com

***Therapeutic Touch As Transpersonal Healing***, by Dolores Krieger. Lantern Books, 2002

### REIKI

**Animal Reiki Source**, San Rafael, CA. Animal Reiki education, practitioner referrals. (415) 420-9783 or animalreikisource.com

***Animal Reiki: Using Energy to Heal the Animals in Your Life***, by Elizabeth Fulton and Kathleen Prasad. Ulysses Press, 2006

**International Center for Reiki Training**, Southfield, MI. (800) 332-8112; reiki.org

**Ministry of Animals**, Elizabeth Teal, Orange Park, FL. ministryof-animals.com or givingpaws.org

**The Reiki Center**, reiki.com

# Stimulus Control

*Getting your dog to do what you want, when you want.*

BY PAT MILLER

Students in my Level 2 class are learning the “stay” behavior. Some of the pupils are doing great with the concept of “stay in the position I left you in until I tell you to change positions,” but one Border Collie isn’t having much success.

Charlie willingly sits on cue, but when clicks and treats don’t come fast enough, he starts trying *other* behaviors in his repertoire – with rapid-fire offerings of shake, speak, down, and even a roll-over finding its way into the mix. He gets so excited about the training game that sometimes he doesn’t even bother to sit first when asked, but drops right into the down – his favorite position. Charlie, an eager worker who loves positive reinforcement, has learned a lot of different behaviors and is anticipating his human’s cues for all his favorite tricks. He clearly doesn’t have his behaviors under *stimulus control*.

Stimulus control means your dog offers a specific behavior when you ask for it *and* doesn’t offer it if you haven’t asked for it.

In reality, the only dogs on earth under total stimulus control all the time are robotic dogs, not living, breathing beings. At best, very well-trained dogs achieve that level of behavior *when they are actively working*. Otherwise, your very well-trained dog could never sit or lie down of his own volition, even when he was “off-duty.”

Before I explain how to get your dog to do what you want him to do, when you want him to do it, allow me to define some terms, and discuss the difference between a positive training approach – like I teach and WDJ advocates -- and a training program that uses aversive techniques.

## Positive approach

A *stimulus* is something that causes a behavioral response. Some stimuli result in a response without training. Things like lights, sounds, scents, and things that cause physical discomfort (heat, cold, pain) are called *primary* or *unconditioned* stimuli. You don’t have to teach your dog to contract the pupils of his eyes if you

## What you can do . . .

- Decide what level of stimulus control is important to you in your relationship with your dog.
- Start with putting your dog’s most fluent behavior under stimulus control to see how it works.
- When the two of you succeed in your quest for stimulus control, take pride in your heightened level of training skill and how it enhances your relationship with your dog.



shine a bright light in them – it just happens. He’s likely to jump when he’s startled by the clang of a stainless steel dog bowl dropping on the kitchen floor, and drift closer to the kitchen when you bake Italian meatballs, even if he’s never experienced those stimuli before.

A “secondary stimulus” is a signal that is meaningless to the dog *until it is associated with a behavior that is then reinforced*. The signal word “sit” means nothing to your dog until you help him connect it to the act of putting his bottom firmly on the floor, and until the sequence of “sit = bottom on floor” is repeatedly reinforced. With training, the initially meaningless “sit” sound becomes the cue for the desired behavior of putting bottom on floor.

In positive training, we first get the dog to do the behavior, *then* add the cue (secondary stimulus). We have a variety of techniques at our disposal to get the dog to do the behavior. We can “capture” the behavior – observing the dog, waiting until he does a certain behavior, and then “marking” it (with the click of a clicker or word



**If your dog often rolls over or plays dead when you ask for a down, he’s clearly does not understand that “Down!” always means down, and only means down!**





Lenny enjoys performing “take a bow” at every opportunity – often, when he’s been asked to “down.” Sarah gives him a verbal and a physical cue (finger pointed down) . . .



. . . but when he persists with the bow, rather than repeating the “down” cue, she turns her back and waits for him to realize that the incorrect behavior will not earn a reinforcement.

such as “Yes!”) and rewarding him for it. Or we can “lure” the behavior, by using a food or toy that your dog moves toward, to get him to move into a certain position or perform a certain movement (which can then be marked and rewarded). Or we can “shape” the behavior, by marking and rewarding your dog for successively more “correct” approximations of the movement or behavior you want.

When we can reliably get your dog to do the behavior, we start adding the cue *just before* he does the behavior. This creates the sequence of “Sit!” = bottom on floor = treat happens (positive reinforcement).

The old-fashioned way of giving meaning to the word “Sit!” was to give the “command” first and then pull up and/or push down on the dog to get the desired be-

havior. The reinforcement in that case was negative; the sit behavior made the pushing and/or pulling go away. This also created the necessary sequence of “Sit!” = bottom on floor = bad stuff goes away (negative reinforcement). This old-fashioned way works, but positive trainers don’t use it; our preference is to help our dogs learn how to solve training problems and *offer* behaviors, rather than physically manipulating or forcing them into position.

Charlie the Border Collie understands that “Sit!” means to put his bottom on the floor – some of the time. He’s made the association, but doesn’t yet understand that it means “always and only.” Lack of stimulus control is a common occurrence in positive training. When we are good at reinforcing dogs for offering behaviors, dogs get really

good at offering them. Plus, teaching new behaviors is often more fun and exciting – and more reinforcing for the dog, since we tend to use more treats and praise when a dog is learning a new behavior. In the beginning, we often reward successive approximations of a new behavior at a high rate of reinforcement . . . and the rewards may slow as we become more selective about what we choose to reinforce, in an attempt to “shape” the behavior and indicate to our dog which approximation of the behavior is the one we want.

We also deliberately slow our treat frequency to a variable pattern of random reinforcement when we put a behavior on an *intermittent schedule of reinforcement* to help the dog learn to keep working even if he doesn’t get a click and treat every

## Karen Pryor’s Rules of Stimulus Control

In 1984, Karen Pryor, a pioneer in the field of marine mammal training, wrote her landmark book on operant dog training, *Don’t Shoot the Dog*; this was before most dog trainers had ever heard of the phenomenon of clicker training. In this remarkable book, Pryor explains the foundation principles of behavior and learning in everyday language, including a discussion of stimulus control.



If a behavior is under stimulus control, it occurs when you ask for it, and doesn’t occur if you haven’t asked for it *when you are in a training or working session*. According to Pryor, perfect stimulus control requires the following four conditions, and only when all four

conditions are met is your dog’s behavior of “sit” truly under stimulus control.

1. The behavior always occurs immediately upon presentation of the conditioned stimulus. (Your dog always sits when you say, “Sit!”)
2. The behavior never occurs in the absence of the stimulus. (Your dog never sits if you haven’t asked him to sit.)
3. The behavior never occurs in response to some other stimulus. (Your dog doesn’t sit if you say “down.”)
4. No other behavior occurs in response to the stimulus (Your dog doesn’t lie down if you say “sit.”)

time. This is done when a dog has become *reliable* at performing a given behavior – that is, he'll do it at least 8 out of 10 times when you ask him to.

A lack of stimulus control may be a common “side effect” among dogs and owners who use positive methods, but it's (in our opinion) preferable to the most common side effects of coercive training methods.

Dogs trained by old-fashioned coercion usually learn that the safest thing to do, unless expressly asked, is nothing. Force-based trainers attain stimulus control with a choke chain, immediately squelching any unasked-for behavior with a sharp collar “correction” – a jerk on the leash. Of course, dogs trained with this method often become very reluctant to offer unasked-for behaviors, so valuable training techniques such as shaping, and a certain degree of trust, go out the window. (See “The Shape of Things to Come,” March 2006.)

## Steps to stimulus control

The first step, getting your dog to offer the behavior on cue, is really the easiest part. Using capturing, luring, and/or shaping, you can elicit and reinforce pretty much any canine behavior you can conceive of, and then add the cue.

Now comes the more difficult part: *not* reinforcing behaviors that our dogs offer spontaneously. But if you want stimulus control, you'll have to be consistent in this.

Of course, you can choose your venues. You can (and should!) still reinforce spontaneously offered default sits *outside* of your formal training session, especially if you've encouraged your dog to offer them – such as in a “Say please” program, where you teach your dog that the very polite and spontaneously offered deference behavior of “sit” makes good things (treats, praise, and other rewards) happen. But when you are specifically focused on training – if

you want stimulus control – you'll need to be very clear with your signals, reward markers (clicks), and reinforcement. So here's the plan:

- Figure out how to elicit the behavior so you can reinforce it.

- When you can elicit/predict a behavior consistently at least 8 out of 10 times, you can add the cue *just prior* to the behavior, and begin fading (diminishing) prompts and lures – treats and body language that help the dog understand what the cue means. During this phase you may need to cue, pause, then prompt or lure, to help your dog transfer his association with the behavior from the lure to the cue. These first steps are the *acquisition* stage of learning; the dog is just figuring out how to do the behavior you're asking for.

- When the cue will elicit the behavior at least 8 out of 10 times without a prompt or lure, you're ready to tighten up your stimulus control; you will no longer click and reward the behavior (sit) if you haven't asked for it, nor will you click and reward your dog if he offers a different behavior (down) when you ask for sit, even if you've been working really hard to get him to offer downs. Work on downs in a different section of your training session to avoid confusion, or in an entirely different session. This is “fluency”; the dog performs the behavior easily, on cue.

- If your dog offers an unsolicited behavior that is different from the one you are working on, or anticipates your cue for the one you *are* working on, remove all reinforcement. You want to *extinguish* unsolicited behaviors (cause them to go away). You may choose to use a neutral-voiced “no reward marker” (NRM) such as “Oops!” or “Time out!” or “Sorry!” as you turn away to remove your attention, or just turn away without a marker. Wait several seconds, and then resume training. Give your cue for the sit again.

- If several short time-outs in succession don't seem to have an impact – if your dog keeps offering the wrong behavior – try a few longer time-outs, like a minute or two, where you actually go away and sit down before you resume training. If you are consistent about removing reinforcement, you should eventually extinguish spontaneous offerings.

## The Barking Stimulus Control Myth

There is an oft-repeated myth in the world of positive dog training that goes something like this: “If your dog has a barking problem, put the bark on cue (under stimulus control). If the behavior is really under stimulus control he will never bark unless you give the cue.”

The fatal flaw in this approach is the incorrect presumption that “under stimulus control” means the dog can never perform the behavior unless you give the cue. If that were true, a trained dog could never sit or lie down unless specifically asked to do the behavior. What an impossibly regimented life that would be!

The danger of this myth is that by encouraging and reinforcing your dog for barking, he's likely to bark *more*, not less, in expectation of reinforcement, just as Charlie the Border Collie offers all his behaviors when asked to sit.

The greatest value of putting your dog's bark on cue is that it gives you the opportunity to also put “quiet” on cue. This is useful if your dog is already prone to being vocal, but I choose *not* to put barking on cue if my dog isn't already offering to bark, because I don't want to risk *creating* a barky dog.

If you do want to teach your dog to “speak,” be sure you put it under stimulus control so you don't end up with uncontrolled demand barking during your training sessions! (Reward your dog's bark only when you've asked for it.)

Keep in mind that this won't prevent your dog from barking an alarm when the doorbell rings, or barking and chasing the neighbor's dog on the opposite side of your backyard fence, or barking in response to a multitude of other environmental stimuli.

However, if you also put “quiet” under good stimulus control, there's a good chance you *will* be able to control his barking once he starts.



## Take a Break!

If you're serious about stimulus control, you need a signal to let your dog know he's on a break, even in the middle of a training session. When you're practicing a rally obedience run-through, for example, you don't want your dog to offer a sit at any point in the routine unless he's cued to do so, either with a verbal sit, a hand signal, or as an automatic sit when you halt in the heeling routine, where a halt has become the cue for sit. When you finish the run, you'll probably pause, even for a short time, before you practice it again.

During this pause you need to either cue your dog to do a "holding pattern" behavior such as down, or give him an "All done!" cue to let him know he's off the clock for a bit and is free to sit or lie down – or sniff – at will.



## Performance anticipation

Some dogs seem to share the same joy we do in practicing a wide variety of behaviors, as if the cue to perform one is an invitation to show off the entire repertoire. This can be frustrating when you're doing an "onstage" performance for your friends and family, your son's class at school, or the residents of the local assisted living facility where you do pet-assisted therapy. You ask your dog to "sit" and, lacking some of the critical elements of stimulus control, he's halfway through his entire trick routine before you've even given him the cue to roll over.

A quick fix for this problem – while you work on stimulus control – is to teach him a solid "wait" behavior (easier than stimulus control), and then use your wait cue following each trick (see "Wait a Bit, Stay a While, May 2001). Your performance might go something like this:

"Skippy, sit!" Click/treat. "Wait!"

"Skippy, shake!" Click/treat. "Wait!"

"Skippy, roll over!" Click/treat. "Wait!"

And so on.

## Critical skill?

So, how important is stimulus control, really? Perhaps not very important, if you enjoy your dog as a companion mostly at home and don't care if he offers random behaviors in the privacy of your own living room. It is probably more important to you if you like to take your dog out in public and want to be sure he will do as you ask in polite company. And it is very

important if you have any plans or dreams of competing in any of the doggie sports that require precision in performance, such as rally, obedience, and freestyle.

It may be challenging to establish stimulus control. It's worth it, however, if you want to wow your friends (and judges) with your dog's training, and reap the rewards of the increased level of communication this builds between you and your canine companion.

The good news is that dogs seem to be able to generalize the concept of stimulus control; once you've established it with three or four behaviors, it tends to get easier and easier as you put more behaviors under stimulus control. Your dog comes to realize that each signal means a different behavior, and that being reinforced depends on recognizing the signal and giving the correct response. It's good to know that your training will get easier as you go along! 🐾

Next month, I'll discuss other ways you can make your dog's performance more consistent and reliable.

*Pat Miller, CPDT, is WDJ's Training Editor. Miller lives in Hagerstown, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center, with her husband Paul. Pat is also the author of The Power of Positive Dog Training and Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog. For more information, see "Resources," page 24.*

*Thanks to trainer Sarah Richardson, of Chico, California, for demonstrating techniques for the photos in this article. For contact information, see "Resources," page 24.*

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# How to Build a Healthy Hound

*Solving your dog's "problem" – whether it is physical or behavioral – requires consideration of his whole world.*

BY NANCY KERNS

Consider the plight of Brandy, a seven-year-old mixed breed, adopted by a suburban family with three kids. In the five years they have shared their home with Brandy, his status in the family has gone from that of a rock star to a pet rock to a neglected pet. Today, he's got some problems – health-related *and* behavioral – and the head of the family is seriously considering "getting rid" of him.

Although this concept induces wails of protest from the kids, honestly, who would miss the silent onslaught of Brandy's deadly farts, or cleaning up the sloppy, gloppy piles of poop he leaves in the backyard three or four times a day? Who wouldn't appreciate being able to leave shoes and socks and cell phones on the floor, without a dog who would chew and swallow them the moment your back

was turned? And wouldn't it be nice to be able to bring friends over to the house without having to lock Brandy in the garage, to keep him from barking and nipping at the visitors? He pulls hard on leash and is sometimes aggressive to other dogs, so he rarely gets taken for the walks that might calm him down.

But wait; Mom loves the dog, farts and all, and doesn't think it's fair to send him back to the shelter just because no one is enjoying him much anymore. She thinks Brandy needs some time and attention, and can be made to resemble the better-behaved, better-loved young dog they adopted years ago. She's ready to call the vet for an appointment for a consultation – or should she hire a trainer?

## A multi-pronged approach

The answer is yes! She should probably make an appointment with both experts, and here is why:

Training approaches that fail to address Brandy's health problems – his poor digestion, hyperactivity, and pica eating (consumption of nonfood items) – may improve some of his behavior for a short time. But his poor health will make it difficult for him to absorb and retain the lessons.

Improvements in Brandy's health will make him more pleasant to live with; with an improved diet and some targeted supplements, he will surely stop producing so much gas, and his feces will become smaller, harder, and less frequent. His pica eating should also decrease. If he feels better, he may become less aggressive to other dogs while being walked. However, remedial training will probably be necessary to improve his behavior enough to enable the kids to walk him again, or to have their friends safely interact with him.

Every aspect of a dog's life affects every other aspect, which can make it

### What you can do . . .

- Think about your dog's life from his perspective (to the extent possible). Make improvements in what you would guess are the most stressful or disappointing aspects of his life.
- Make a list of every chemical substance that your dog regularly comes in contact with: household, garden, internal, and topical. Reduce his exposure to as many as possible.
- Improve your dog's diet, increase his exercise, and look for stimulating and fun new activities to enjoy together.



**Too many of our dogs are underexercised, undersocialized, understimulated, undernourished, and overweight! This lifestyle is a recipe for poor mental and physical health. Turning this around will benefit your dog – and you, too!**

difficult to decide where you should start with a dog like Brandy. No single effort you make, no matter how huge, will miraculously turn everything around. A homemade diet might vastly improve his health, but he may still be a pain to live with. Twice-weekly private lessons with a positive trainer might solve almost all of the complaints about Brandy's behavior, but won't make him (or the backyard) smell any better!

The good news, though, is that a multi-pronged, holistic approach, comprised of incremental, intelligent improvements in his life, just may save the dog.

### Where do you start?

Most holistic veterinarians say the most important part of a health-promotion plan is improved diet; most trainers will say it's increased exercise. We propose that these two keystones of health are equally important; both need to be implemented ASAP.

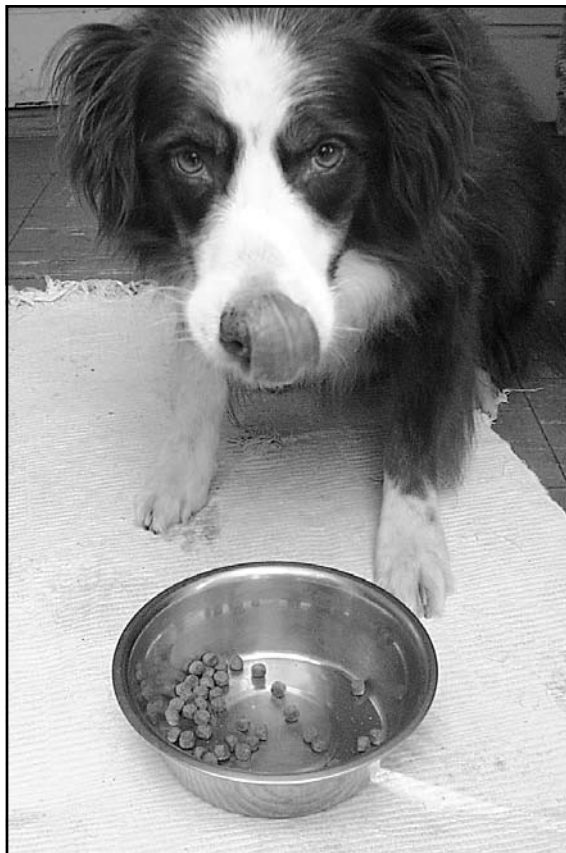
Unless your dog is in peak health, and eating a home-prepared diet of fresh foods, you can improve his diet. If you already feed a high-quality product, but your dog still has persistent digestive problems or any signs of food allergy, you should try a change of food.

Look for a different variety of food from the same maker, or a product from a different line, or, best yet, an entirely different product from a different maker. If you feed kibble, consider a dehydrated food, like the products from The Honest Kitchen, or a frozen raw diet. Make notes on your calendar or in a notebook indicating when you switch foods, and what type and variety of food you use.

If you are feeding a low-quality food, you should buy a higher-quality product. Foods that contain greater amounts of high-quality proteins and fats provide more of the nutrients beneficial to dogs, including a more complete panel of amino acids and omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

An improved diet can make a world of difference to the attitude and responsiveness of a dog who suffers from a chronically upset stomach.

Very few dogs receive adequate opportunities to exercise as much as their wild ancestors did – or even as much as their more recent ancestors did just a few



**Don't take our word for it. Only your dog can tell you whether a food is truly "best" for him. If he has health problems, change and improve his diet!**

decades ago. Exercise releases endorphins, making the dog feel better. It strengthens bones and soft tissues, and burns calories. It improves the circulation of the lymph system, helping the body move waste products out of the tissues. Exercise also helps dogs feel tired! This is a tremendous boon to dogs who are chronically anxious, hyperactive, or aggressive.

It can be a real challenge to provide adequate exercise opportunities to a dog with aggression issues, or to one who is so overstimulated by the outside world that he's difficult to walk. But exercise is absolutely critical for improving these dogs' mental health and behavior!

Wrack your brain and use your imagination to think of activities and safe locations to use to thoroughly work these dogs. Search for remote ponds or lakes where you can swim your dog. Ask your friends and relatives if they know of any safely fenced, open areas where you can take your dog for intense off-leash exercise. (I used to take a friend's dog-aggressive Lab to a lighted tennis court at night, when it was rarely in use, to run after tennis balls and play "chase me!" Look for

experienced dog walkers or doggie daycare facilities that will take on difficult dogs.

Of course, exercise must be tailored to your dog's age, level of fitness, interests, and physical limitations. But even senior dogs with arthritis and dogs with severe physical limitations can benefit from activities adapted to their abilities. For example, many dogs with paralyzed rear ends have shown tremendous improvement after just a few sessions of therapeutic swimming and guided stretching in a warm water therapy pool.

### Reduce toxic burden

If you made a list of every toxic chemical your dog was directly exposed to on a weekly or monthly basis, you'd probably be shocked. The list would probably include hundreds of pesticides, herbicides, cleaning agents, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from building materials and furnishings . . . and that's not counting the pesticides we apply directly to their skin!

"All of these substances are strangers to the body and need to be processed by the liver and other organs," says Jenny Taylor, DVM, a holistic veterinarian in Oakland, California. "Even products that are supposed to stay on the surface of the body can be absorbed through the skin and enter the bloodstream. Avoid these medications when possible, or ask your vet or holistic practitioner for alternatives."

Yes, we're exposed to many toxins, too, but we don't generally lick our skin and feet – and we surely don't spend as much time as our dogs breathing the highly polluted air near the floors of our homes. (Many common solvents have a higher molecular weight than air, so they settle toward the floor.) And due to their body mass and their rate of respiration, dogs, like infants, are also more susceptible than we are to toxic chemicals in the air.

Try to reduce the number of toxins your dog is exposed to. Use natural agents to clean your home, furnishings, and bedding. Keep windows open as much as possible to reduce indoor air pollution. Keep your yards organic, and rinse your dog's paws after strolls on public lawns, which are often liberally coated with garden chemicals.

## Stress reduction

Many of us make jokes about how hard we have to work to support our dogs, while they laze around on our couches. But most of us fail to consider how stressful our dogs' lives are from *their* perspectives.

For example, having an opportunity to sleep for many hours a day, enjoying peace and quiet alone in the house sounds like heaven to most people, but it can be near-torturous for many dogs. Canines are pack animals, hard-wired to live in complex social groups. They are also wired for mentally stimulating environments, where they would have to solve problems, exercise, and use their wits to locate, hunt, and gather food on a daily basis. While some dogs are perfectly happy sleeping for 18 hours a day in a house five or six days a week, it's like solitary confinement in a hostile prison to highly active and/or social dogs. It's no wonder so many dogs soil their homes, destroy the furnishings, or bark all day.

Far fewer dogs suffer from overstimulation and overactivity than boredom, but it can happen. A dog who has to be compelled to get into the car may be burned out from your social schedule.

Do some thinking about what sort of dog your companion is, and whether the lifestyle you have imposed on him really suits his temperament. You'll have to look for clues (and be open to their obvious interpretation, even if it's an inconvenience). For example, if he's moderately pleased to see you when you get home, and your house is intact, he's probably doing fine. But if goes berserk while you're not home, or goes into a hyperactive overdrive when you get home, and this doesn't resolve within 10 or 15 minutes, he would benefit from more opportunities to get out and de-stress.

## Appropriate medical attention

Medical surveillance, treatment, prevention, and oversight are important parts of a holistic healthcare program – but only if the medical professional heading the dog's healthcare "team" orders only those procedures and medications that do the most good with the least side effects.

In our opinion, it does more harm than good to employ the services of a veterinarian who enthusiastically promotes every available vaccine, strongly recommends year-round flea and heartworm preventatives (no matter what the climate),



**Dogs thrive when they receive regular exercise that is within their capabilities. The fresh air, sunlight, contact with clean dirt, and mental stimulation of being outdoors is also hugely beneficial to their overall health.**

and practically requires that their patients be fed commercial "prescription" diets.

Instead, we look for veterinarians who promote wellness exams and preventive healthcare practices (like fresh, species-appropriate diets and regular exercise). We seek out vets who are knowledgeable about and use gentle, natural remedies that stimulate the dog's body to heal itself as first-line treatments, before reaching for strong-arm antibiotics and steroids. And we appreciate practitioners who approach the task of healing with spiritual awareness, reverence for all life, and a deep compassion for animals.

Generally, practitioners who fall under this latter category describe themselves as "holistic" or "integrative" veterinarians. Frequently, they have acquired extensive training in alternative or complementary medical modalities such as acupuncture, chiropractic, homeopathy, or herbal medicine, and offer these treatments in addition to (or as a replacement for) Western medicines and procedures. Less commonly, they embrace holistic healthcare, but refer their clients to nonveterinary colleagues who specialize in alternative or complementary therapies.

We're huge fans of holistic practitioners, particularly because they tend to be the only vets who are knowledgeable about, promote, and support natural diets. But

we're equally wild about veterinarians with strong Western medical skills and access to the latest diagnostic tools and tests. In a dire emergency, we're taking our dogs to the closest clinic equipped with x-ray and EKG machines, a CAT scanner, and in-house laboratory – not our holistic vet's office. Ideally, every dog owner would establish a relationship with both types of practitioners – and these professionals would respect and work well with each other to best serve their canine patients.

## The big picture

If you don't regard your dog as perfectly healthy, mentally and physically, consider addressing each of these areas to an extent within your abilities. If your dog is regularly examined by a competent holistic vet, receives a reasonably high-quality diet and daily exercise, has frequent opportunities to socialize and enjoy the outdoors, and has the benefit of interaction with and attention from you, he'll be sure to remain a "rock star" in your life, rather than a neglected pet. You may not be able to provide the ideal solution in each aspect of your dog's life. But if you at least make small improvements in every area, we guarantee his health and behavior will improve, too. 🐾

*Nancy Kerns is the editor of Whole Dog Journal.*



# Alternative Views

*Holistic veterinarians discuss the basics of holistic healthcare.*

BY NANCY KERNS

**W**e asked several veterinarians who use complementary and/or alternative medicine: “What are the most basic precepts of ‘holistic care’ that dog owners should understand and employ? The points that you want them to absorb if they are to become your regular clients? What dog care practices do you consider to be the bedrock of a vibrant wellness program, and why?”

As one might expect from individuals who have explored highly divergent paths in holistic medicine, their answers were idiosyncratic.

## Diet and exercise

**Ihor Basko, DVM**, has been practicing veterinary medicine since 1971. He was an “early adopter” of holistic treatments, using nutritional therapy, Western and traditional Chinese herbs and medicine, acupuncture, massage therapy, laser therapy, and hydrotherapy in his practice. Dr. Basko is also one of the founders and current President of the Veterinary Botanical Medical Association. His practice is located in Hawaii.

There are two dog care practices that Dr. Basko considers the bedrock of a wellness program – a wholesome diet and regular exercise. “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has stated that 80 percent of all human life-threatening diseases are due to poor diet and inappropriate exercise,” says Dr. Basko. Dogs, he suggests, are similar.

Dr. Basko’s comments reflect a phenomenon we have observed in many dog owners (not necessarily those who are our readers!): Guardians who are really knowledgeable about their dogs’ diet are the exception, not the rule. When asked whether there is one message he’d like all of his clients to absorb, he says owners should not succumb to laziness or apathy about their dogs’ diets. Owners need to do

their homework, he says. “Don’t believe what commercial dog food companies tell you about their products. They have no idea about where the food has originated, nor are they employing any quality control methods to screen for pesticides, heavy metals, and other contaminants in their foods. Begin studying nutrition and how it relates to your particular dog’s breed and condition.”

Finally, Dr. Basko echoes another of our strong recommendations: That owners



**Dogs have no say in what veterinarian will treat them; it’s your responsibility to find practitioners with the most suitable, gentle, effective treatments.**

find a good veterinarian. “Find a veterinarian who speaks your ‘language,’” he says. It’s critical that you and your dog’s primary doctor share good, clear communication and shared beliefs to ensure your dog will receive the best care.

## Don’t suppress symptoms

**Bert H. Brooks, DVM**, opened a mixed animal practice in 1980, in Woodland, California. About 10 years ago, Dr. Brooks added the word “holistic” to the name of his practice, currently called Cache Creek Holistic Veterinary Service. Dr. Brooks is also author of the new book *More Than A Theory: A New Medical Paradigm*. He

uses energy from nutritional supplements, herbs, homeopathic medicines, flowers, and frequency generators, and delivers the healing energy remotely by way of the Harmonic Translation System. He also uses muscle response testing.

Dr. Brooks would like dog owners to understand that “holistic care should *always* address *causes* of bothersome symptoms and not just suppress symptoms the way conventional allopathic medical practitioners are trained to do.” Even many practitioners who consider themselves to be “holistic” in philosophy still offer only alternative methods of handling symptoms, he says. “I believe the biggest mistake made in medicine today is the use of substances – including natural substances – to eliminate symptoms but which do nothing to address causes. The second biggest mistake is to think the problem is cured because the symptom was suppressed.”

Like many holistic practitioners, Dr. Brooks also considers diet to be an important part of a canine wellness program. However, he’s aware of the difficulties of finding just the right diet for each dog.

“While proper nutrition is undoubtedly the foundation for a healthy life, there exists much debate on the precise definition of ‘proper nutrition.’ Different holistic practitioners have different philosophies concerning this subject, and each opinion is probably valid for a certain portion of the canine population. The reason for this apparent contradiction is that not all dogs need the same nutrition. It is the same problem that commercial dog food companies run into when they try to design ‘the perfect dog food,’ one that contains everything that all dogs need in order to be healthy and lead long lives.

“Each individual dog is unique, and the nutrition for that animal can not be contained in any bag or can which is fit for the consumption of *all* dogs. Over time, nutritional deficiencies tend to compound

before they begin to show up as symptoms. Raw whole foods are philosophically the closest to nature, but some dogs are not tempted by them, and some do not do well on them. The hard part of nutrition is determining what each individual needs.”

## Health is dynamic

**W. Jean Dodds, DVM**, is the founder of Hemopet, the nation’s first nonprofit dog blood bank that also rescues Greyhounds from the racing industry and finds them new homes. Dr. Dodds is renowned for her research on canine vaccines, and on behalf of Hemopet, she consults in clinical pathology nationally and internationally, and regularly travels to teach animal health care professionals, companion animal fanciers, and pet owners on hematology and blood banking, immunology, endocrinology, nutrition, and holistic medicine.

Dr. Dodds considers the concept of “holistic dog care” as wholism, “the original, traditional form of health care that encompasses the whole body and the ambient environment.” In wholism, the sum of the body is more than the sum of its constituent parts, so any treatment that addresses a sole aspect of the dog’s body would be considered incomplete and inadequate.

Dr. Dodds cites a number of practices as the foundations of a holistic canine wellness examination. In order for a “holistic veterinarian” to effectively treat a dog, the vet should take a complete family and patient history (medical *and* environmental), conduct a physical examination, and ask about the dog’s current diet; vaccination and medication history; use of heartworm, flea, and tick preventives; and recent illnesses. The vet should also gain access to any recent laboratory or other diagnostic reports, ordering any needed tests (or repeating tests that weren’t done properly.) Only when all this is taken into account can appropriate treatments be prescribed.

Finally, Dr. Dodds says that owners should keep in mind that, “Medicine is an art and a science, and pet health is a dynamic process that changes.”

## Diet and vaccines

**Mark Newkirk, VMD**, has been in veterinary practice in New Jersey since 1981, offer-

ing “complementary medicine,” which he describes as “whatever works best!” Dr. Newkirk uses herbal therapy, homeopathy, chiropractic, Metabolic Nutritional Balancing, and NAET (an alternative allergy elimination therapy). Dr. Newkirk recently opened a new practice, the Animal Rehabilitation and Sports Medicine Center in Egg Harbor Township, NJ, offering animal chiropractic, physical therapy, an underwater treadmill, therapeutic ultrasound, and neuromuscular electrical stimulation.

When introducing a new client to holistic healthcare, Dr. Newkirk says, he starts by discussing the concept that a dog is a dog. “It’s a carnivore, not a little human! So right away, I talk to them about what the dog’s diet *should* be – high-protein, with no grains, and no artificial preservatives. I talk about the options available to them: higher-quality dry products, as well as prepared, raw diets. If they are willing to prepare their dogs’ food, we’ll discuss that, but I also let them know about the difficulties involved with balancing the diet, and the importance of feeding the meats raw. I prefer to steer them toward either a holistic dry food or one of the fresh, frozen foods.

“The second thing I discuss with them is appropriate vaccination. The vaccination needs of a hunting dog are going to be quite different from those of a toy Poodle living in a highrise. I want to tailor the vaccine program to the individual based on his or her needs. If the dog is older, I talk about vaccine titers, and how it would be best if we could test the dog’s titers so we don’t vaccinate him – overvaccinate him – if he already has sufficient protection.

“I’ll go into more detail about nutrition or behavior if this is indicated. I use Metabolic Nutrition Analysis to prescribe specific supplements to correct the imbalances or deficiencies we find in that dog. If the dog is having behavior issues, I’ll talk about behavior concepts – especially if the dog is living in circumstances that don’t suit who he is, like putting that hunting dog into that highrise apartment – and discuss holistic remedies that can help.”

## Reconnecting to life

**Richard Palmquist, DVM**, is head of integrative medicine at Centinela Animal Hospital in Inglewood, California. He is the Research Chair of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association and uses nutrition, acupuncture, homotoxicology, conventional medicine, and surgery in his practice.

A holistic viewpoint, says Dr. Palmquist, is larger than merely a symptom set seen in a patient. “Holistic care involves the treatment of patients while respecting the connections they have to all components of Life. Holistic approaches seek to connect the patients back with Life and to improve their abilities to use their biological nature in the pursuit of the actions of living.”

Different healing tools and modalities are used in holistic veterinary practices as specialized tools. “Acupuncture reconnects and balances Life energy,” explains Dr. Palmquist. “Herbal medicine helps to reduce disease signs, decrease oxidative damage, relieve pain, and promote organ healing. Chiropractic realigns damaged physical parts. Energy medicines such as homeopathy, homotoxicology, Reiki, craniosacral therapy, and others align the physical, mental, and spiritual portions of the organism. Yes, I did say spiritual and that is a big part of holistic medicine – recognizing the spiritual nature of Life.”

Western medicine, too, has its place in a holistic practice, says Dr. Palmquist. “It is interesting to note that all medicines capable of assisting a patient in recovery are holistic and that includes drugs, but typically there is a barrier between drug use and holistic medicine out of a belief that these fields are different.” 🐾

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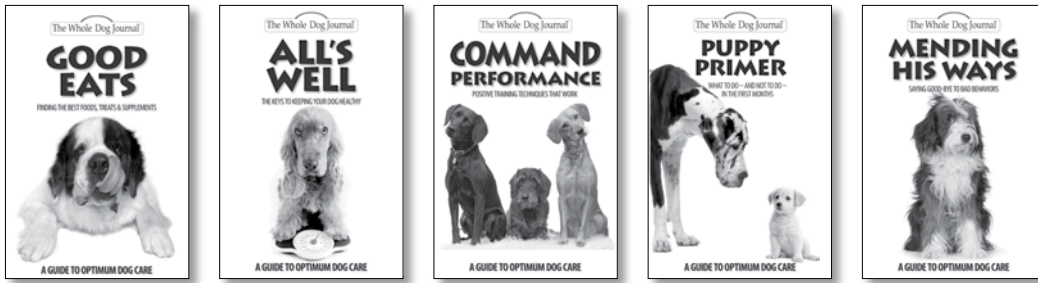
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*The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care* and *Natural Remedies for Dogs and Cats*, by WDJ contributor CJ Puotinen, are available from DogWise, (800) 776-2665 or dogwise.com. Puotinen is also author of several books about human health, including *Natural Relief from Aches and Pains*, available from your favorite bookseller.

### HOLISTIC VETERINARIANS

American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (AHVMA), 2214 Old Emmorton Road, Bel Air, MD 21015. (410) 569-0795. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a list of holistic veterinarians in your area, or search ahvma.org

### TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION

Pat Miller, CPDT, Peaceable Paws Dog and Puppy Training, Hagerstown, MD. Train with modern, dog-friendly positive methods. Group and private training, Rally, behavior modification, workshops, intern and apprentice programs. (301) 582-9420; peaceablepaws.com

Sarah Richardson, CPDT, The Canine Connection, Chico, CA. Positive reinforcement dog training and owner education. Group classes, private lessons, and behavior consultations. (530) 345-1912; thecanine-connection.com

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) has references to member trainers in your area. Not all members employ similar training methods, nor does APDT set standards of skill or competence. APDT encourages (but does not require) its members to use training methods that use reinforcement and rewards, not punishment. (800) 738-3647; apdt.com.

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