



BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION 101



Objectives

- Improve our skills as trainers by understanding how animals learn
- Build a training toolkit that can be applied to many different behavior problems
- Practice a few examples
- Q&A



Definitions



- **Behavior Modification:** Changing the dog's emotional response to a stimulus in order to change an undesirable behavior. Creating positive associations to things and situations that previously cause the dog stress and/or anxiety.
- **Counter conditioning:** to change the emotional response an animal has to a specific thing or situation; re-teach and change a previously learned response.

Basics of Animal Learning



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVVBGJi5v9s>

Basics of Animal Learning



The foundation of all training and behavior modification is the way that dogs learn: they learn by the **immediate consequences (OC)** of their actions and **by association (CC)**, by noticing when events tend to happen one after the other. These are also known as operant and classical conditioning.

Basics of Animal Learning

□ Classical Conditioning – CC

□ IF (event X)

THEN (event Y)

■ Example(s):



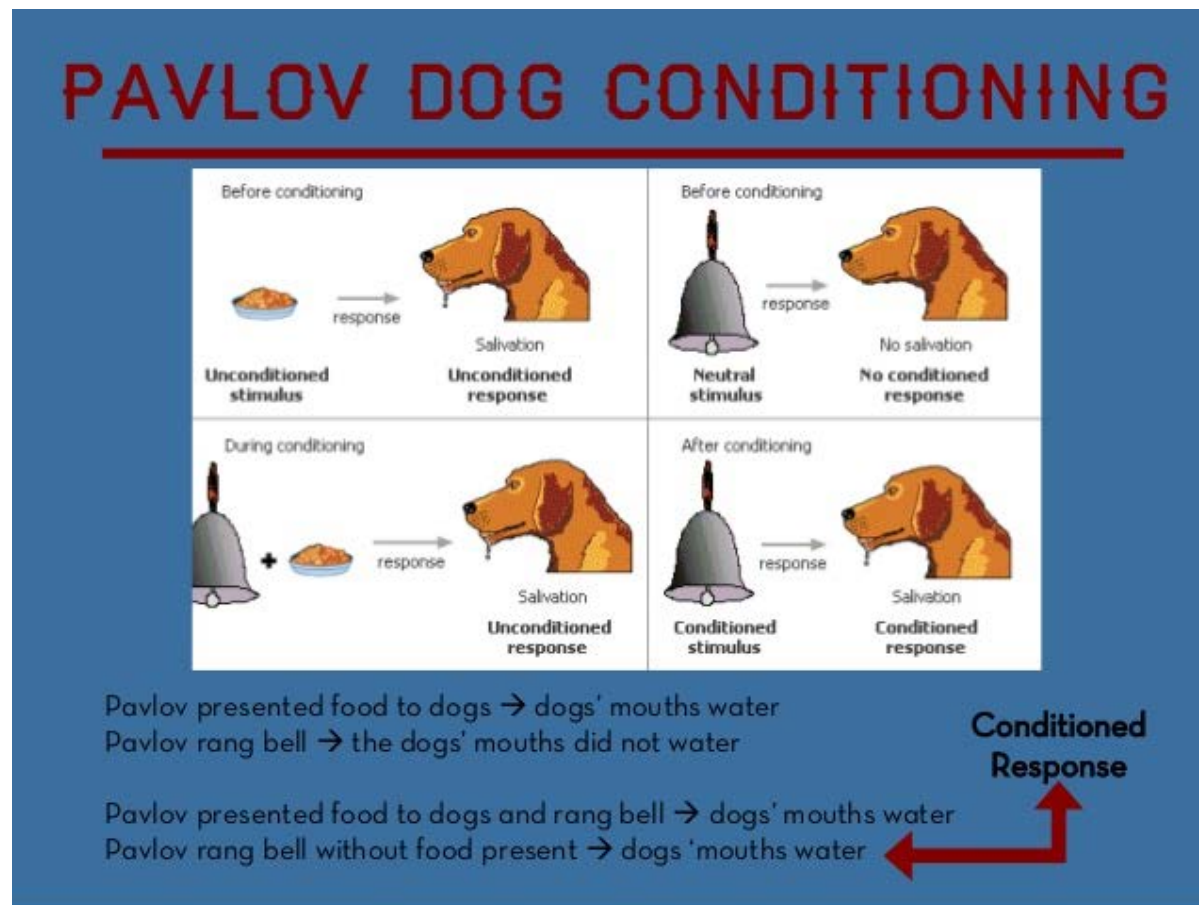
- Dog might learn that car rides predict fun at the dog park.
- Dog could learn that car rides predict a scary trip to the vet
- *Whenever one thing happens, this other thing happens next*

□ Video: **Classical Conditioning with a slightly reactive dog.**

- <https://youtu.be/PZXc2QoZewo>

Basics of Animal Learning

□ CC – Classical conditioning



Basics of Animal Learning

□ Operant Conditioning – OC

□ IF (behavior)  THEN (consequence)

■ Example(s):

- **IF** you touch a hot stove **THEN** you get burned
- **IF** your dog raids the garbage, **THEN** he parties on leftover food
- *These are all behavior-consequence contingencies, which is what animals learn in operant conditioning.*

Basics of Animal Learning

- **OC – Operant Conditioning** - Think "Consequences" - or the fact that dogs learn through actions resulting in rewards or punishments.

For example: You have trained your dog to sit and become calm before putting the leash on to go for a walk. In this case the dog must perform a voluntary action of sitting and relaxing. If he complies, he enjoys the reward of going for a walk.


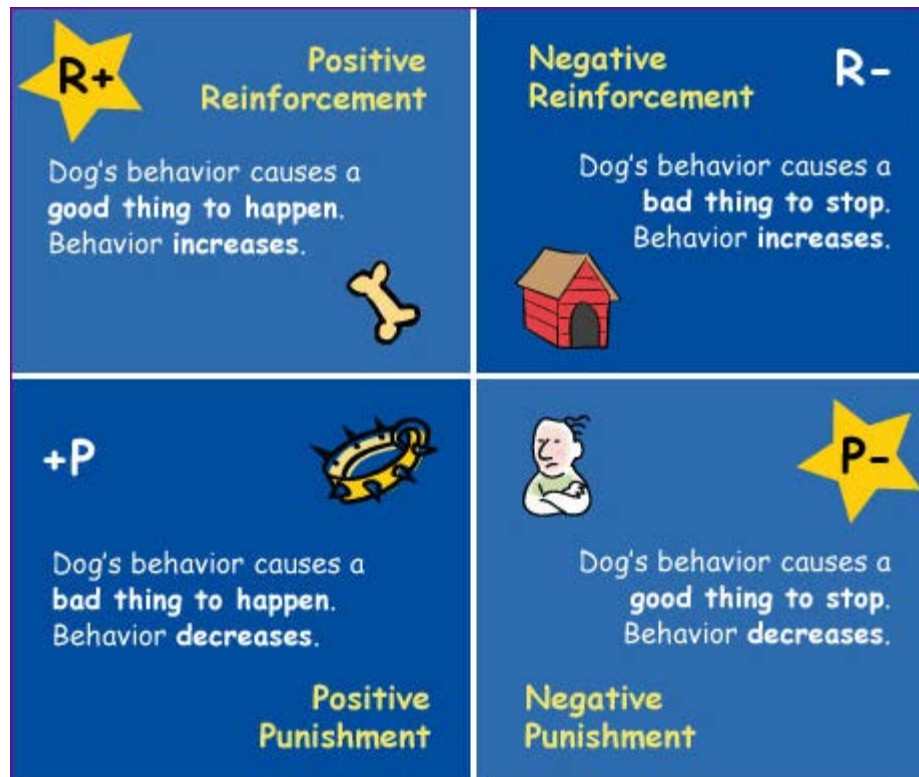
If he doesn't sit and relax, he is denied the walk (which is a punishment).

Essentially-learning by consequence




Basics of Animal Learning

- Video explaining the 4 quadrants of Operant Conditioning:
 - <https://youtu.be/GoyHoJOzjK0?t=4m21s>



Reinforcement increases the behavior



Punishment decreases the behavior

Basics of Animal Learning

□ Extinction

- Learning doesn't just mean the addition of behaviors. Animals also learn when existing behavior no longer works.
- When the behavior is reinforced, its likelihood increases- It will stay strong if it is reinforced.
- If reinforcement stops – the dog is no longer paid, behavior dies, which is called extinction.
- Animals learn when behavior doesn't work any more and so stop doing it.



Training

- **Prompting:** Coaching or manufacturing the behavior – then reinforcing
- **Capturing:** Waiting for the behavior to happen on its own – then reinforcing
- **Shaping:** Waiting for or prompting closest approximation of final behavior – then reinforcing



Key Points while training:



- Have a “quiet body”
- Timing and Rate of Reinforcement:
- Don’t be “stingy” with your rewards. Be sure to “pay” every time.
- There is no point attempting to train an unmotivated animal.

Key Points while training:

- ❑ Frustration – always end on a positive note
- ❑ Consistency – your training won't have any results if someone else in the household is accidentally training a different behavior
- ❑ Train in steps - small progress over time
- ❑ Training never “ends!”

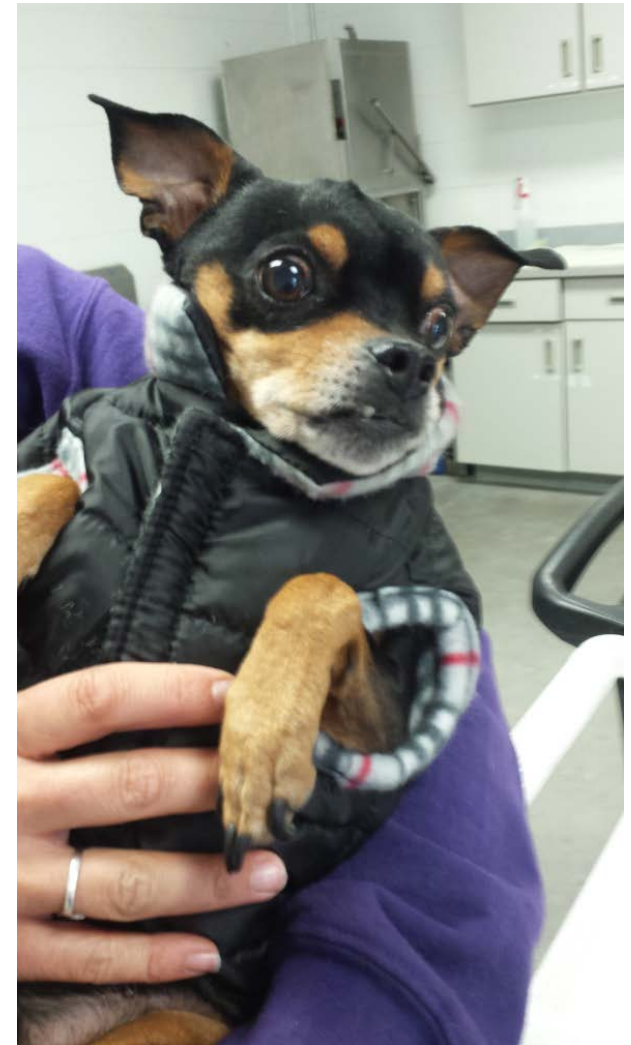


Things to consider...

- Am I adding to the problem?
 - Ex. tightening up on the leash, holding breath, grabbing collar, anxious/raised voice
- Is my pet engaged throughout the training session?
 - May need to shorten sessions, try a change of venue, or change your reward
- Don't simply "remove" a problem behavior
 - Replace undesirable behavior with a different, incompatible behavior
 - Swap out a "good" behavior so your pet knows what to do instead

Body language/warning signs

- ❑ Essential to understand your pet's body language and watch closely for warnings
- ❑ If your dog is giving warning signals, they are nervous and are not learning what you are trying to teach
- ❑ Never push your dog too far as it can result in a bite



Protracted Warning Signs

□ “Whale eye”



□ Short, pursed lip



This is a preliminary aggressive threat. The dog's ears are back, she's giving a direct stare and her lips are pulled over her teeth.



The threat is more serious now. Her muzzle extends forward and she's giving a low growl.



Now she's wrinkled her muzzle to expose her front teeth. She's growling loudly and preparing to lunge forward and attack.

□ Lip licking/tongue flicking



□ Yawning



Stress Yawn

Protracted Warning Signs

□ Ears back



□ Tail tucked



□ Worry lines



□ Curved body posture



Protracted Warning Signs

- Baring teeth



- Lies down, leg up



- Growling

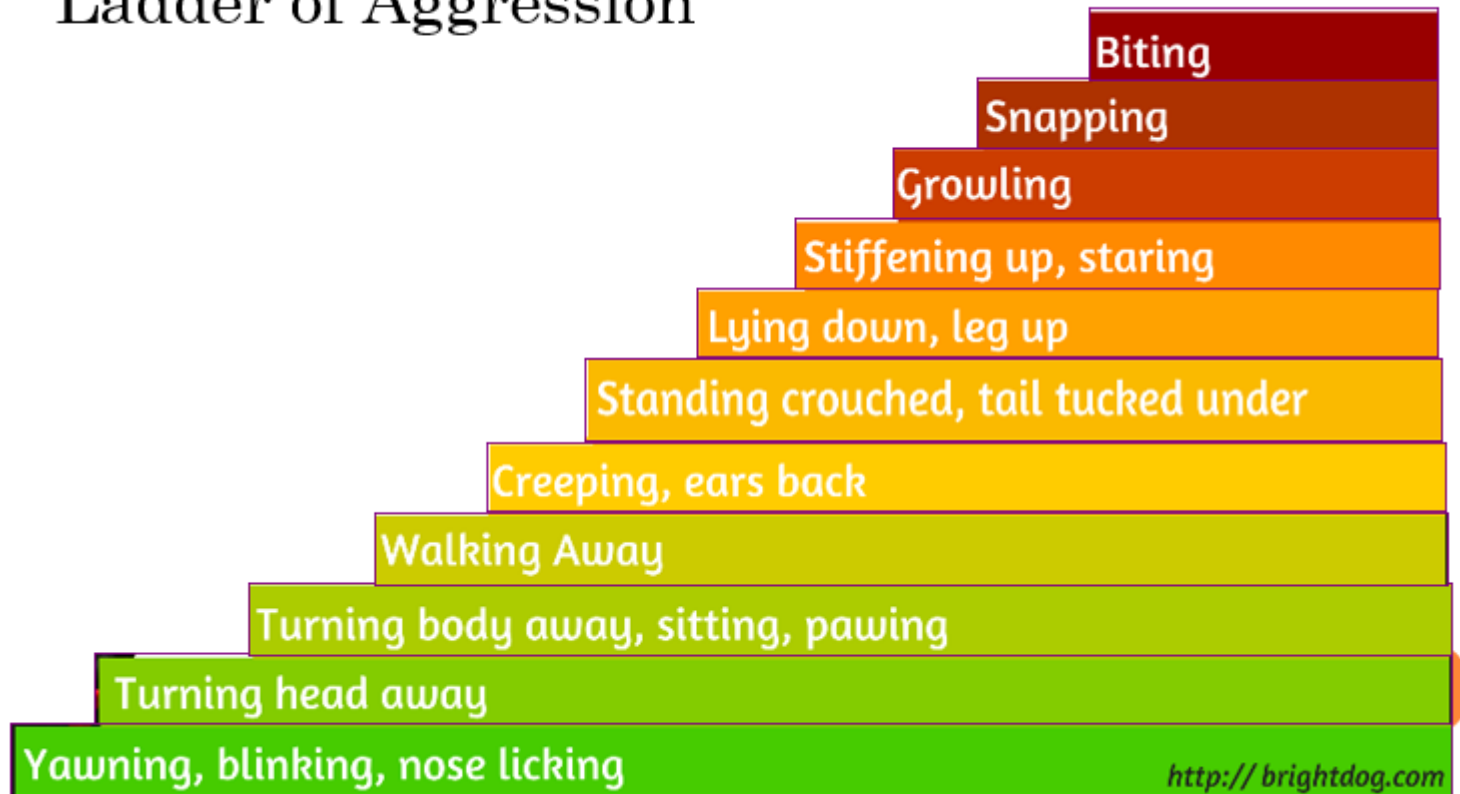
- Snapping



Don't push your foster dog this far!

Ladder of Aggression

Ladder of Aggression





Examples

- **Crate training**
 - **Step one:** Create a positive association with the crate by tossing some treats around and inside and letting your dog explore the crate on their own
 - **Step two:** Once your dog is comfortable entering the crate on their own, begin feeding meals in the crate
 - **Step three:** When your dog is comfortably eating meals in the crate, close the crate door until they are done. Gradually increase the time the door is closed after your dog finishes eating.
 - **Step four:** Give the behavior you are asking for (going into the crate) a verbal cue. Practice adding the verbal cue before meal times until your dog understands the verbal cue.

Examples

- Crate training (continued)

- **Step five:** Practice leaving your dog alone in the crate. Give their verbal cue, throw a few treats, and close the kennel door. Sit quietly by the kennel for a few minutes, then go into another room for a short period, then return and sit quietly for a few more minutes before letting your dog out. Gradually increase the length of time you are out of the room.
- **Step six:** Once your dog can remain calm in the crate while you are out of sight for 30 minutes, try leaving them home alone for short periods of time in the crate. Gradually increase the time they are home alone in the crate.

Examples

- Crate training: what training tools did we use in this plan?
 - Classical conditioning
 - Operant conditioning
 - Positive reinforcement
 - Capturing
 - Shaping



Examples

- Food guarding – Before starting your plan, identify what objects your dog guards and how close you need to be to see signs of guarding. Also identify a very high value treat or food item your dog prefers to standard kibble.
- **Step one:** Place an empty dog bowl on the floor and casually walk close enough to toss in high value treats. Allow your dog to eat all the treats in the bowl and disengage before throwing more treats into the bowl. Repeat until your dog expects treats and looks up as soon as they finish eating.
- **Step two:** Throw in treats at a more frequent pace, adding the next handful before your dog stops eating. If they show any stiffening, lip curling, growling, etc. go back to step one.



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[Misty food guarding b-mod steps one and two](#)

Examples

- Food guarding
 - **Step three:** Offer your dog a bowl of low value kibble. Slowly approach the food bowl and from a safe distance (far enough away your dog has no reaction to your presence), toss high value treats into the food bowl. Continue tossing the entire time your dog is eating. Slowly decrease the distance you are standing from the food bowl as long as your dog remains relaxed. Go at your dog's pace.
 - **Step four:** Once you are relatively close to the food bowl, stay at step three until your dog stops eating and looks up from the food bowl in anticipation of the treats. When your dog stops eating and looks up at you, hand feed a treat.

[Misty food guarding b-mod steps 3 and 4](#)

Examples

□ Food guarding

- **Step five:** Once your dog reliably lifts his head from the food bowl every time you approach to receive a treat, you can move on. While the dog is taking a high value treat from your hand, practice moving the food bowl slightly away using a fake hand (Assess-a-hand). If the dog stiffens, growls, rushes the bowl, etc. go back to step four. If the dog shows no reaction continue practicing this for several sessions.
- **Step six:** If your dog has been consistently showing no reaction to moving the bowl with the fake hand, begin feeding the dog a handful of high value treats while you pick up his bowl. Pick up his bowl and return it promptly, practicing several times each session.
- **Step seven:** Continue to repeat this process, changing the location, trainer, type of food in bowl, etc. to ensure the dog is generalizing the behavior to different types of situations. Start at the beginning with each new trainer.

Examples

- Food guarding: what tools and knowledge did we use?
 - Classical conditioning
 - Operant conditioning
 - Positive reinforcement
 - Shaping

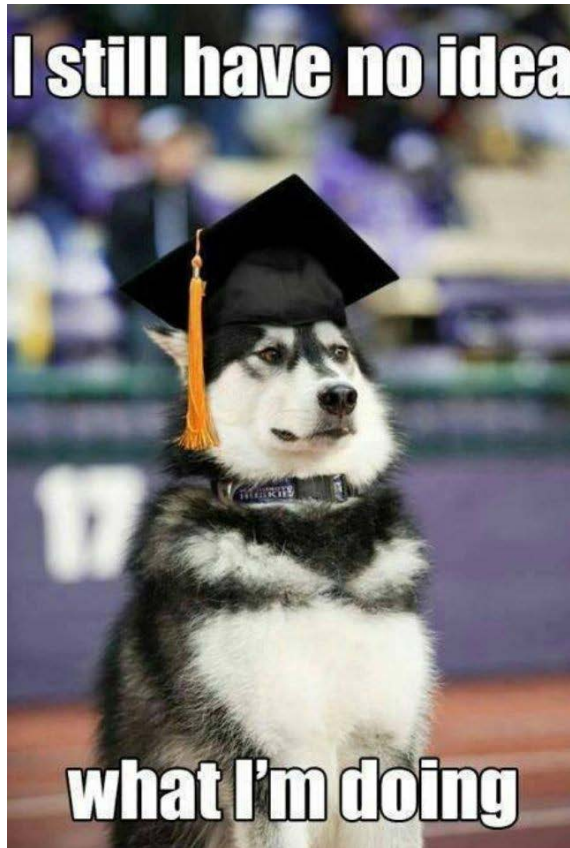


Try it yourself!

- Stranger danger
 - How would you start?
 - What steps would you take?
 - What tools/knowledge would you use?



Other notes



- You can apply these tools to most behavior problems
- If you are fostering a pet with significant behavior problems, please follow the behavior modification plan set by staff

Any questions?

