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# TRAINING APPROACHES

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## OVERVIEW

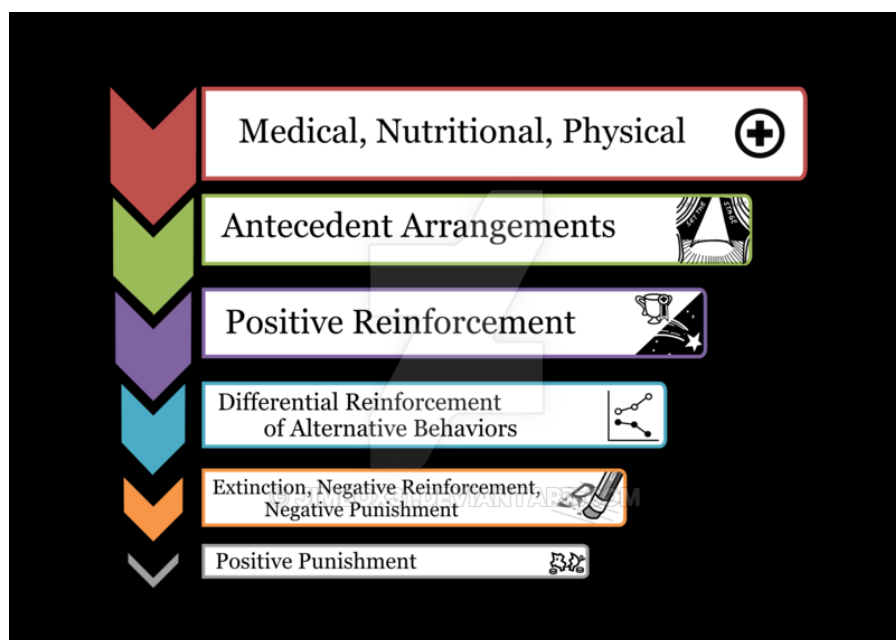
When we are training dogs, we can address problems and find solutions by using Dr. Susan Friedman's Human Hierarchy of Dog Training. This method utilizes the least invasive methods first, then gradually moves to more invasive methods if success is not met at one of the higher levels.

The first things that should be addressed when working on any behavior are physical factors, the environment, and antecedents. For physical factors, we need to consider the size, age, physical health, and behavioral health of the dog. If we are trying to house break a puppy but the puppy has a urinary tract infection, we will not be very successful until the infection is treated, and the puppy is feeling better. When addressing the environment, we can take into consideration things like: is the environment familiar, or strange? Is it busy, with a large number of exciting distractions? Puppies must first learn and practice skills in a calm, familiar place before we can expect them to perform in a new, busy location. Over time, they should be able to adapt to a new location and do the behaviors we ask, but that's only if they have had practice building up to such situations.

Antecedents refer to events that precede others, and therefore the dog learns to anticipate an outcome, and may act before being told to because of that anticipation. For example, if a dog has many unpleasant experiences with other dogs, the appearance of another may cause the dog to react before it is near. Antecedent arrangements can be thought of as setting the stage for our dog; setting them up for success by not intentionally creating a situation where they will be unable to perform as expected. When we address the physical health of the dog, the environment, and antecedents first, we are setting ourselves up for success by knowing the root of a behavior. This allows us to pick a more effective method of dealing with it.

The next levels of the humane hierarchy get into the training methods available to work through a behavior. Positive reinforcement is considered the least invasive, minimally aversive training method. This is because when using this method, a dog is rewarded for the correct behavior. This helps to extinguish the undesired behavior, provided that the dog is not rewarded or reinforced for performing the undesired behavior. Dogs will perform behaviors they deem useful, whether we agree or not. Rewarding a dog for the correct behavior can help reduce the likelihood of undesired behaviors, because the dog does not have to test all its options to determine which behavior gets it the desired outcome. If sitting is a reliable way for a dog to get treats and

attention, and those things are reinforcing to the dog, then it will ultimately rely on sitting to get what it wants, rather than jumping or barking. Heavily reinforced behaviors will eventually become habit.



Friedman, 2008

Differential reinforcement of alternative behaviors is a bit of a mouthful, but it is not complicated when broken down. Simply put, it means rewarding a dog for behaviors that make an undesired behavior impossible to perform. For example, if a dog tends to jump up on guests as they walk through the door, heavily reinforcing staying on a dog bed across the room keeps the dog from being able to jump up on a guest. Differential reinforcement of alternative behaviors is a bridge between positive reinforcement and extinction, negative reinforcement, and negative punishment.

Extinction is the removal of a behavior through a lack of reinforcement. A good way to think about this is to not reward the behavior you do not want. Sometimes we can accurately assume what is reinforcing to a dog, such as treats, food, or attention. But sometimes there is an unseen or accidental reinforcer, that makes a behavior stronger. To use the jumping example, some dogs find any form of attention to be reinforcing, even if that attention is negative. In that case, every time the dog jumps up and the person responds, the dog is being reinforced for the behavior of jumping because it got what it wanted: the attention of the person. If instead the person remains motionless and boring or walks away from the dog where it can't follow, the dog learns that jumping does not get it what it wants. Negative punishment is on the same level in the hierarchy as extinction; it is the removal of a desirable stimulus in order to reduce the likelihood of the behavior.

In the case of the jumping dog, if it has previously been rewarded for jumping (unintentionally or not), when that reinforcement is removed, the dog will go through an extinction burst. That means that the behavior will temporarily increase in intensity because the dog has a history of that behavior getting the desired results. Then, after the burst, the behavior will be extinguished.

Negative reinforcement is the strengthening of a behavior by removing an unpleasant stimulus. If the dog is stimulated with small leash tugs while pulling, but the tugs stop when the dog stops pulling, the dog learns that keeping the pulling short or not doing it at all will end the annoying sensation. Extinction, negative reinforcement, and negative punishment are lower levels on the humane hierarchy. While they can be useful training tools, they leave the situation open to interpretation on the dog's end. If we are not actively rewarding the behaviors we want, we leave it to the dog to figure out what behavior gets the result it desires. The important distinction here is that it is the outcome the dog desires, not the outcome we desire.

Positive punishment is the lowest tier on the hierarchy because it can be considered aversive and invasive. Positive punishment is the consequence of an unpleasant stimulus in order to decrease the likelihood of a behavior. Scolding, swatting, muzzle grabbing, and yanking on the collar are all examples of this. For it to be fully effective, it must be intense on the first application. The timing of positive punishment is more delicate than rewarding a behavior. Similar to the techniques listed in the previous paragraph, positive punishment can leave the situation open to interpretation and the dog may experiment to determine what behavior gets it the desired outcome. Positive punishment is a fast teacher for dogs when applied correctly, which is why it is still a popular training method.

The updated Foster Puppy Curriculum follows the humane hierarchy. The exercises are set up in such a way that rewarding the correct behaviors is the first step, and using positive punishment is the last option.

## DEFINITIONS

**Positive Reinforcement:** addition of a rewarding stimulus to increase the likelihood of a behavior

**Negative Reinforcement:** removal of an unpleasant stimulus to increase the likelihood of a behavior

**Positive Punishment:** addition of an unpleasant stimulus to decrease the likelihood of a behavior

**Negative Punishment:** removal of a rewarding stimulus to decrease the likelihood of a behavior

**Antecedents:** an event that precedes another; i.e. always cueing a dog to “Down” after cueing a “Sit” leads to the dog expecting to move into a “Down” after being told to “Sit”