

AGGRESSION AND FEAR

Worksheet for practical lessons with František Šusta; www.trainingisdialogue.com



WARNING, THIS SHEET SERVES FOR STRUCTURED LESSONS WITH A TRAINER, not as instructions for use



THERE ARE QUITE FEW CASES OF FEAR-MOTIVATED AGGRESSION. FEAR AND FLIGHT ARE NOT RELATED WITH FOOD AT ALL. THAT'S WHY SNACKS ALONE CANNOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM!

A behaviour never exists alone, but there is always a trio: ANTECEDENT - BEHAVIOUR - CONSEQUENCE. So the dog is never "just bad", but the aggression occurs upon a specific antecedent, and the behaviour brings immediately something to the dog. Similarly, flight occurs "upon

something" and "brings something to the animal".

Question No. 1: DEFINE exactly A) the antecedent - B) the behaviour - C) the consequence for your specific problem. Does the consequence consist in punishment or reinforcement? That is, will the behaviour be reinforced or suppressed?

Example of good definition: A) An adult guy, more than some 180 cm high, has reduced the distance under 1 meter from the dog and has not responded to warning. B) The dog bites. C) The guy does not approach any more. The consequence consists in negative reinforcement; the inconvenience was eliminated at the time of the behaviour. Therefore the behaviour with this scenario will be further reinforced.

Bad definition: A) The dog is dominant. B) It bites people. C) Because it enjoys biting = it is a bastard and must learn its place in the pack hierarchy!

Answer:

A.....

B.....

C.....

Reinforcement or punishment?

Prognosis?

If your problem deepens in the course of time or simply persists, then the behaviour is definitely reinforced. If it were not reinforced, it would not persist. So, if for example an outburst of aggression is followed by punishment in form of a yank on the leash and the behaviour continues without change in the long term, then there is certainly something before the yank, something that plays reinforcing role, "overriding" the punishment.

Question No. 2: If we already know A, B and C, we can solve our problem at each (or all) of these levels. We only have to decide what we are able to do:

Are we able to remove the antecedent or to accustom the animal to it?

Are we able to create another behaviour for the animal, to meet the same purpose in another way?

Are we able to change the immediate consequences of the animal's behaviour (in each individual case of the behaviour)?

Note: Usually the easiest and also the most ethical way is to change the problem on the basis of the antecedent (remove it or accustom the animal sensitively to it). If that is not possible, it can be changed on the basis of the behaviour and, only as the latest resort, on the basis of the consequence (including punishments). If we decide to change the behaviour (B), we must respect the following three principles. The replacement behaviour must 1) have the same function as the original one (the same primary reinforcer), 2) bring at least the same or greater profit than the original one, 3) be easier for the animal, as compared to the original one (ideally something the animal already can do).

We have just mentioned the term primary reinforcer. We can imagine primary reinforcers as simple basic needs the animal need not be taught, as it is born with them already. There are actually only very few basic needs of such kind; they are related to the animal's survival and later to reproduction. In the course of life, the basic needs are joined by secondary reinforcers that have somehow been related with the primary reinforcers by the animal. For example, food is primary reinforcer, and the clicker that marks its arrival is secondary reinforcer to the dog.

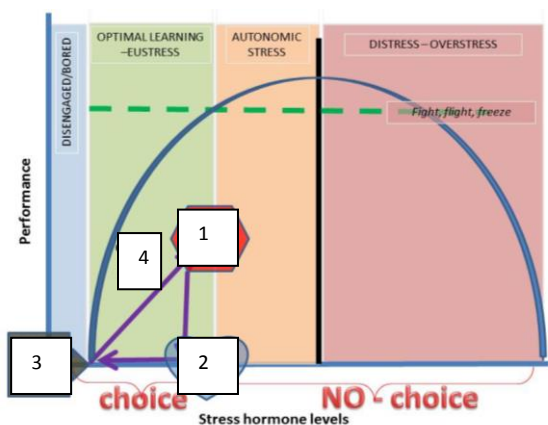
Question No. 3: Choose at which primary reinforcer the problematic behaviour of your dog aims? If we decide to think up a replacement behaviour, it must aim at the same one.

Choose: Water Food Temperature Control

Note: Control does not mean "control to the others down" but rather "know the working of the things around me and know that I am able to survive in such constellation". We almost could replace it by "safety" or "awareness of safety". Control as primary reinforcer is usually behind a great part of aggression displays. So if we want to teach the dog other behaviour instead of aggression aimed at control, the replacement behaviour must satisfy the primary reinforcer of control. That means for example that if a dog on the leash comes to the owner instead of assaulting an approaching dog, the owner must see that the other dog does not approach too much.

Problematic behaviours are mostly related to stress in some way. For the animal to be able to work for snacks during training, it must be in the stage of so called eustress, when the individual's performance still improves under pressure, but it must not have overstepped the critical threshold to so called autonomous response (FFF - fight, flight or freeze). In order not to overstep the critical threshold, the animal needs to have answers to 4 important questions:

1) How to stop the stress antecedent? 2) Where to relax (i.e. safe place)? 3) How to start new training after relaxing? 4) Why to do all that (question of reward)? - see the picture:



Question No. 4: Does your dog have answers to all of the above mentioned questions? If it is not the case, how can we provide the dog with the answers?

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Note: Notice that if we do not give the answers to the dog, the dog will seek them in some own way if in crisis. The aggressive assault against an approaching dog is actually an answer to STOP; the flight from gunshots is an answer to SAFE PLACE, etc.

Question No. 5: Well, what training plan shall we choose? The plan must definitely be based on all preceding answers, and, just in case, let's expect that the first idea may not work... but the next could perhaps work already ☺. I WISH YOU GOOD LUCK!

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