

TAKE HOME NOTES FROM SUSAN FRIEDMAN’s Living & Learning with Animals Seminar, Sydney Australia, Sept 2013

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* Ask yourself, What is the function? of a behaviour.
* Animals DO stuff to GET AWAY or GET CLOSER to something/someone – ask yourself what is the consequence of the behaviour to see how you can change the behaviour.
* In what settings does the problem behaviour occur? What can you do to manage the environment so the problem behaviour cannot be practiced?
* We can solve most problem behaviours looking at the environment in which the problem behaviour occurs and the consequence of the behaviour.
* Try to avoid labeling an animal as having some personality trait; rather use detailed description of what the animal does. BE SPECIFIC. Don’t spend time on what you can’t know – rather spend time and energy on behaviour change.
* Owners want to know how to STOP a behaviour. Instead try and focus their energy on what they want the animal to do instead.
* ACT ETHICALLY. Look at your treatment of a problem behaviour and try and solve it in the least intrusive manner eg DO NOT use a SHOCK collar for BARKING, instead ask why is the dog BARKING? Think carefully before you implement a plan. Every time an intervention fails there is more likely to be failure in the future.
* In general POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT techniques would be used before other training methods because it is the most ethically acceptable. It is also most likely to create **enthusiastic** learners.
* A behaviour will only continue if it is being REINFORCED. Animals only engage in behaviours that have a pay off for them. Ask yourself what is being reinforced when an animal engages in a behaviour.
* Look for situations where you can **train calm behaviour**. Teach animals what you want them to do. **LEAD.**
* Phobias can develop from one fearful encounter. Think about how animals perceive you – especially in the vet clinic scenario - what can we do to make the environment calmer for patients. Ask owners to practice handling procedures, such as muzzle training, ballpoint pen-training simulating vaccination injections.
* Because of the cultural fog around behaviour owners may have inaccurate knowledge regarding the training of animals. They may need to be reeducated regarding how animals learn. They may think animals are incapable of change and learning. We must help them to understand the science of learning without prejudice. They have come to us for help – it is our job to educate them kindly.