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## Positive Associations

When rehoming a rescue dog or an older dog from a friend or family member there may have been an association that has been made with a particular object, person or place. It can also affect puppies from puppy farms or those that have not had a positive environment when with their Dam.

The dog may react to these places, objects or people and can be seen as behaviours - anything from a freezing or avoidance behaviours, fearful behaviours, or snapping and nipping at a human or another dog.

Most people do not like needles or the dentist. This is usually that when you see the dentist or have to have a needle there is discomfort and pain associated with the object (needle) or person (dentist).

Dogs learn the same, what made them feel uncomfortable (restricted such as a lead, harness or even a muzzle) or gave them pain (such as veterinary needles) they learn to avoid it or to defend themselves against it.

This can be seen below the association between the lead (causing a restriction) creates a fear and the dog then seeks to avoid (run) or defend (bark, lunge, nip or bite)



## Body Language Basics

It is important when working with a dog that you have some basic understanding of observable body language signals that the dog will do. This gives you a visual insight in the time to give the dog space or to slow down in your approach.

### Signs of stress

- Lip licking
- Panting
- Whale eye
- Frowning
- Tight body language
- Tense muscles
- Hard tongue (if panting)



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- Whining
- Avoidance behaviours (moving away or looking away)
- Ear tension
- Puffing cheeks

## Associations

Let's take a lead for example

At this point we are not attempting to get the lead on the dog as the sight of the lead may create 'fear'. We are going to use food treats (or a toy or game) to change the feelings the dog has with the lead.

The following stages are controlled by the dog and their responses. These sessions can literally be 2 minutes long or less and frequent to allow the positive associations to have many repetitions.

Avoid rushing any stages as this will undo any trust that has built up

### Place, Object, Person

The lead in this instance is the object. It is placed on the floor and any time the dog looks at it interacts with it you are going to 'mark' with either a word or a clicker and then toss a treat **away** from the lead. Sessions are kept short a few minutes at a time

### Interaction stage

The dog anticipates the lead at this stage when it's on the floor and starts to look to you for the rewards.

Approaching the lead, sitting by the lead now has a positive response.

You pick up the lead and may hold it in the one hand. Dog approaches and noses it.

Mark and reward. Keep sessions short - start with this stage only when there's no stress signs in later sessions

### Body stage

This stage **go slow**.

Lead out, start at interaction stage, you may need to build up associations with the 'clasp' of the lead. Again just flick the clasp and mark interaction.

With the clip go towards the dogs clip ring and just do the sound, mark and reward. Repeat and then stop.

On clipping the lead onto the dog, mark and reward. Drop the lead and let it trail.



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Once your dog has the feel for the lead without you being on the end of it restricting him it and you are rewarding any movement with it, asking for a sit, maybe a hand touch so having the lead on becomes a positive association, you then need to ask your dog for a sit, gently pick up the lead, mark and reward that.

You then need to remove the lead from the dog, this is where having a Likimat™ or Kong™ may help as this can be placed for the dog to focus on whilst you gently undo the clip and again, click that (even though he has a reward ongoing). I often leave the lead a short distance away whilst the dog is relaxing as important that they can see that this 'tie' to you is a positive one. After a few minutes pop lead away.

By doing this with a simple lead, harness, muzzle etc you begin to see that the dog's response to the lead is positive and that having it on calmly and slowly gains his favourite treats.

Now what has happened?

### ***LEAD + TREATS = POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS***

I like to call this the relationship bank account and I'm making deposits into our relationship



Avoid rushing a dog through this process as rushing builds suspicious behaviours and makes a withdrawal on your bank account.

Once the dog has a fantastic association with the lead and enjoys walks, the walks will be the reward for having the lead popped on.

Again, I will be helping you with the practicalities of this too – even if it's a harness, muzzle or other type of association training that needs to take place.