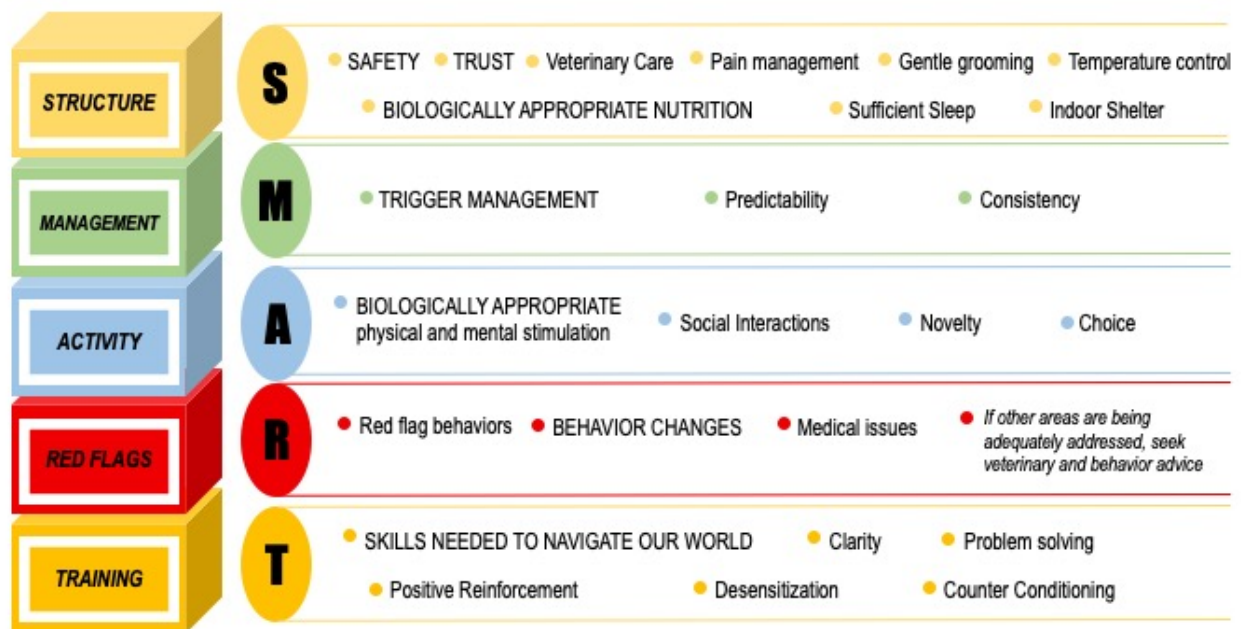




## A holistic approach to your relationship with your dog

### S.M.A.R.T.: Structure, Management, Activity, Red flags, Training

The S.M.A.R.T. protocol is a *holistic approach to our relationship with our dog*. It provides a framework that addresses all aspects of a dog’s life: physical, social, environmental, and bridging the communication gap between our two species. When we attend to each area of the framework, we are setting our dog (and ourselves!) up for success. Conversely, when there are deficiencies in the framework, these can manifest in behavior we find undesirable.



## STRUCTURE

Structure simply means we’re creating a healthy environment where our dog can thrive *physically and emotionally*.

## **Safety**

For a dog, feelings of safety usually come with appropriate shelter, protection from danger (keep in mind a dog's perception of danger may be different from our own), protection from long exposures to extreme temperatures, and an environment largely free of loud noises that could be frightening. A fearful dog's safety requirements will differ from those of a happy-go-lucky dog.

## **Trust**

Dogs are more likely to thrive in an environment where they trust their people. Although this seems obvious, we do things all the time – usually inadvertently – which may hinder that trust and compromise our relationship – *especially* a new relationship. For fearful dogs, this could be little things like making direct eye contact or leaning toward them. For happy-go-lucky confident dogs, poor/aversive training or lack of clarity about what we want them to do can affect how they view us and their overall sense of wellbeing.

*Without feelings of Safety and Trust, a dog will have a hard time learning.*

## **Medical Care**

Pain and illness can cause behavior changes. There are many health problems that can affect your dog's personality, some of which can be quite serious. Some health problems may not show obvious symptoms. This is especially common as your dog becomes a senior (10 years for small dogs and 7 years for larger dogs) and begins to develop age-related diseases. *Pain management for acute and chronic conditions, such as arthritis, should be at the forefront of your dog's healthcare plan.*

For dogs struggling with behavior problems, a health screening by a veterinarian is recommended. A behavior consultant will work hand-in-hand with your veterinarian.

## **Nutrition**

We live in a time where new information about canine nutrition is all around us. Many of these discoveries are parallel to what we're learning about human nutrition: too many carbs and processed foods contribute to chronic health conditions such as obesity, cancer, and other inflammation-related illnesses. Some research suggests that emotional conditions such as anxiety can be affected by overall gut health. *The bottom line is that many pet dogs are not getting a biologically appropriate diet through commercial dog food.*

*Do your research and talk to your veterinarian about what's appropriate for your dog.*

### **Keep the following in mind:**

- Dogs need about 15 calories/per pound of their weight/per day to maintain weight. A 10-pound dog would need 150 calories. Check the label on your dog food to determine appropriate calories. These requirements will vary by age and breed and level of activity.
- Biologically appropriate food is MUCH healthier for your dog and saves money on vet bills in the long run.
- Variety is important to dogs, both physically and mentally. Imagine if all you got to eat every day was a bowl of dry Cheerios. Jazz up your dog's meals with a little warm water,

wet food, lean meat, veggies. Do your own research and talk to a veterinarian who is current on today's canine nutrition research.

- Food doesn't always have to be fed from a bowl – “foraging” is very reinforcing for dogs and stimulates an important part of the brain called the “seeking system”. Consider tossing some of your dog's food in the yard so he can sniff it out. Or use a puzzle bowl, interactive toy, or a snuffle mat to deliver some of his food.

## Sufficient Sleep

The average dog sleeps for about 12 to 14 hours per 24-hour cycle. Puppies, who expend a lot of energy exploring and learning, may need as much as 18 to 20 hours. Older dogs also tend to need more rest, as do certain breeds.

*Anxious dogs often don't get enough sleep, so they can be “edgy” and exhibit behaviors like jumpiness, flinching at noises, other behaviors you might observe from a stressed animal. Like in humans, lack of sleep can have a profound impact on a dog's nervous system long term. Sleeping too much can also indicate other health problems, both physical and emotional.*

## Gentle Grooming

All dogs need some sort of grooming, even if it's just a once-in-awhile curry brush over a short coat to remove dead skin cells, which can cause irritation. For many dogs, going to the groomer is a lot like going to the vet: sensitive body parts are being handled, invasive equipment is being used, and the environment is filled with sounds and smells of stressed-out animals. It can be downright scary! Look for a groomer who tries to alleviate fear and stress with gentle handling, and whose shop feels more spa-like than facility-like. If your dog has problems being handled, work with a behavior consultant who has experience with this issue.

## MANAGEMENT

When we seek to change a dog's behavior, we assess the elements of Structure, then we determine if there are ways we can *manage* the environment to prevent our dog from being rewarded for the unwanted behavior. Behaviors that are rewarded are reinforced, and behaviors that are reinforced are likely to happen again.

*Keep in mind that rewards/reinforcement oftentimes don't come from us; the dog may be getting reinforced by something in the environment (mailman approaches, dog barks, mailman leaves), or even at a neurochemical level (a dopamine boost due to the dog's completing a habit loop).*

## Predictability & Consistency

Like some people, some dogs feel safer and perform at their best when their environment and routines are relatively predictable. Knowing what is about to happen can provide the clarity a dog needs to feel in control. *Anxious and fearful dogs tend to do better with predictability and consistency.*

## Safe Place = Sanctuary

Most dogs, and particularly fearful or anxious dogs, need a safe place they can go to avoid stressful triggers and to just chill out. A “sanctuary” is necessary for even the calmest of dogs if they live in a noisy environment and/or with small children. A crate is usually ideal, unless this type of confinement creates distress for your dog.

- Work with a behavior consultant to learn how to turn “confinement” into “sanctuary”.
- A “safe place” is a must-have for dogs that struggle with “stranger danger” when visitors enter the home.
- Being able to handle confinement and being alone is an essential life skill for your dog.
- A crate-trained dog can go lots of places with you, which makes life – yours and theirs – a lot more enjoyable.

## Trigger management

Triggers are the things that set our dogs off. *The more a dog practices the triggered behavior, the more entrenched it becomes.* Sometimes we can prevent behavior we don’t like simply by changing something in the dog’s environment. For example, if your dog barks at people through the window, consider closing the curtains or using a gate to prevent your dog from accessing that area of the house while you work on a behavior modification plan. If your dog has trouble when guests enter the home, don’t involve him in the guest-greeting ritual until you and he have learned how to handle it.

*Anxious and fearful dogs are likely to have triggers that may not be obvious to us.* A behavior consultant or qualified trainer can help identify triggers and give suggestions on management while you’re working to modify your dog’s behavior.

## Personal Space Violations - a common trigger

Fearful or anxious dogs may have larger personal space requirements than their happy-go-lucky counterparts. For a fearful dog, even eye contact can trigger a fight-or-flight response, resulting in barking, lunging, biting, or hiding. For these dogs, we must do our best not to put them in a position that might trigger the fight-or-flight response while we work on a behavior modification plan.

Becoming aware of our body language and what we’re doing with our eyes, head, shoulders, arms, torso, and feet will help us manage these triggers.

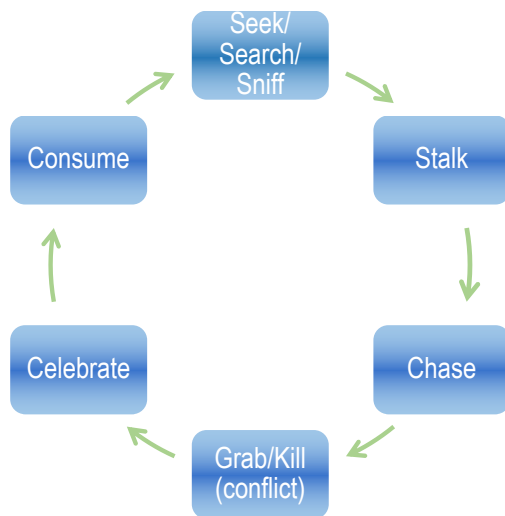
### Common ways we may “violate” a sensitive dog’s personal space:

- Making and/or holding eye contact
- Leaning toward or over the dog
- Reaching for the dog
- Approaching the dog with an object – dog-related or not – in your hand
- Walking into a space or room where the dog has no “escape route” and may feel trapped
- Walking directly toward a dog vs a curved approach or less-threatening posture

## ACTIVITY (& ENRICHMENT)

### Activity

Lack of biologically appropriate physical exercise and mental stimulation can create frustration and is often a key contributor to our dog's behavior problems. Dogs enjoy **activities** that mirror the predatory cycle – *see diagram below*. Depending on your dog's breed type, he may enjoy certain parts of the sequence more than others. For example, your Border Collie may live to chase a ball while your Bulldog could spend all day on a tug toy.



- **Seek/Search/Sniff**
  - “Find It”, Puzzle toys, snuffle mat, nose games, novelty, “sniffaris” on a long line, car rides
- **Stalk**
  - Personal play with your dog – high and low arousal
- **Chase**
  - Flirt pole, ball toss, keep away, take turns
- **Grab/Kill**
  - Tug, spring pole, wrestle, weight pull, bite sports
- **Celebrate**
  - Woo Hoo!, victory lap
- **Consume**
  - Shredding, dissecting, chewing

### Play

*One of the best ways to build (or fix) a relationship with your dog is through play.* Play is wonderful for helping fearful dogs “forget” – even if for a moment – about being afraid.

### Choice and Consent

Responding to your dog's cues of “yes, please!” or “no thank you” is critical when engaging in play. When dogs realize they have control over this, it is a huge confidence builder.

### Cues for clarity

Most dogs respond well to basic verbal cues that provide clarity during play:

- “Ready?” = time to play, we're about to have fun
- “OK” or “Go” = game is on, release to chase a flirt pole, grab tug, chase a ball
- “Easy” = tone it down a bit (your body language needs to illustrate “easy”)
- “Out” or “Drop It” = an interruption to drop or let go of a toy
- “All done” = game is over, (put toys away, disengage). To avoid frustration with some dogs, let “All Done” be the end of play but the predictor of you tossing a handful of kibble for your dog to go find.

### **Low-arousal personal play**

There is exciting research in the area of low-arousal personal play, which simply means quietly playing with your dog *as if you were trying to engage a shy toddler*. Although we're not yet sure why, this type of play has been reported to help overall reactivity. It is suspected that this type of play boosts oxytocin, the "bonding" hormone, in the brains of both dog and human.

The key is that this type of play is completely dog driven: you might initiate it with a teasing poke and "wanna play?" then your dog will let you know. If he looks away, that's "no thank you". If you lean back and he comes toward you to engage, that's "sure!". *Responding to your dog's cues of consent are key.*

### **Basic guidelines for play**

- Quit play *before* dog gets overly adrenalized and undesirable behaviors (jumping, mouthing, chasing) begin to emerge.
- Non-verbal play and de-accelerating *your* body language (eye contact, voice) can help calm down your dog's play.

### **Enrichment**

In addition to biologically fulfilling play activities, it is also important we consider other forms of *enrichment*. The term "**enrichment**" means to enhance the quality of our dog's life by providing stimuli necessary for optimal well-being. Simply put, *stimulate the senses*. Novelty and variety are *very* important to dogs, and enrichment can help reduce stress by occupying the animal's mind and create lots of *good brain chemistry*.

### **Cognitive (problem solving)**

- Food puzzle toys – Kongs, puzzles, snuffle mats, slow feeder bowls
- Foraging opportunities – searching for pieces of dog food in the grass or hidden in a wadded-up towel
- Training – positive reinforcement training of tricks and standard obedience behaviors

### **Auditory (hearing)**

- Music – spa sounds, calming music – Spotify, Pandora, Alexa all have channels.
- Audio Books – the sound of a human voice can be soothing.
- Biologically significant sounds – sounds from nature – Spotify, Pandora, etc.

### **Visual**

- TV – biologically significant, such as Animal Planet, National Geographic. (If the sounds are too stimulating for your dog, turn down the volume).
- Outdoor view

### **Olfactory (smelling)**

- Novel scents – pile of laundry, essential oils, new outdoor spots, your shoes and clothes after you've come home from work/an outing.
- "Sniffari" walks – where your dog is on a relaxed long leash and allowed free time to sniff sniff sniff.
- Nose work – specialty classes where dogs learn to identify specific scents

- Pheromones – chemical substances produced by animals (and humans) –dog appeasing pheromone can have a calming effect. Adaptil is a brand that has collars, diffusers and other dog appeasing pheromone products.

### **Taste**

- Food puzzle toys
- Variety of treats – softer treats tend to be more appetitive.
- Novel food items – a wide variety of freeze-dried animal “parts” (cod skins, chicken necks, chicken feet, etc.) and other types of chews (Yak cheese, pork skin rolls) can be found in most pet stores.

### **Novel experiences**

- Car rides
- New places
- Outdoor access
- Change of scenery

## **FRUSTRATION**

### **Common things that conspire to create frustration for our dogs:**

- Our busy lives that require our dog spends a lot of time alone or confined
- Unstimulating environments
- Lack of access to outdoor space and the ability to run
- Lack of novel environments to explore
- Leash-associated frustration

### **Behaviors that may be a result of or exacerbated by boredom/frustration:**

- Digging
- Destructive Chewing
- Fence fighting
- Leash reactivity
- Abnormal repetitive behaviors (self mutilation, tail chasing)
- Over-the-top attention-seeking behaviors toward other animal and human family members.

## **Novelty**

Novelty is very important to dogs. Mixing things up, whether it’s regularly rotating the toys in your dog’s toy box or training your dog a new trick once a month, is important to your dog’s overall happiness.

**A word about neighborhood leash walks**  
Structured walking on a leash is a skill a dog needs in order to successfully navigate our human world. Like church manners for a 9-year-old child, it’s a necessary life skill, but if that’s *all* they get to do, you would have one frustrated kid. Suburban neighborhood leash walks can be like church manners for your dog.

## Socialization

Socialization means your dog has been exposed to – *and can effectively cope with* – new people, places, sights, sounds, smells, situations, and other dogs or animals. Depending on your dog's age, temperament and previous experiences, your efforts to properly socialize your dog will vary.

For fearful or anxious dogs, new experiences can be overwhelming. A systematic approach to desensitizing and counter-conditioning your dog to stimuli they may find frightening is key. *Avoid flooding, a behavioral term that means exposing your dog to intense levels of the things that frighten it.* For example, if your dog is afraid of the vacuum cleaner, do not force your dog to “face its fears” by tethering it to a table while you vacuum the room. This will serve to worsen your dog's fear. *Unlike people, dogs aren't able to make the connection that nothing bad happened, so it must be O.K.*

Work with a behavior consultant to determine the best ways to socialize your dog.

### Basic guidelines for socialization:

- Puppies have unique socialization requirements. [Read Get Puppy S.M.A.R.T.](#)
- Adult dogs benefit from socialization, too.
- Always carry treats to create a good association for new things.
- If your dog seems overwhelmed or unsure, go to a place where he seems more relaxed.
- Avoid “flooding” by over-exposing your dog to experiences that frighten it.

## RED FLAGS

Red flags are behaviors of aggression, reactivity, anxiety or extreme fear. These behaviors should never be ignored, as they do not get better on their own.

### Leash reactivity

When a dog becomes overly aroused – agitated, barking, lunging, overly excited – when it is on leash and sees other dogs, people, or other triggers, we call this “leash reactivity”. This is usually a result of frustration and/or fear: a dog trapped on a leash is unable to interact with its environment or flee.

Work with a behavior consultant or qualified trainer to learn how to identify your dog's threshold, which is the point where your dog is in the presence of its triggers but isn't reacting. From there, focus on developing skills and behaviors you both need to de-sensitize and counter-condition your dog to its triggers.

### Resources & Resource Guarding

Resources can be anything a dog finds valuable. Dogs have different strategies to control access to a resource. The most obvious are 1. Avoidance (grabbing an item and taking off with it), 2. Rapidly ingesting food or other item, 3. Displaying threatening behavior (growling, freezing, hard stare, baring of teeth) and 4. Aggressive behavior (snapping, biting).



Accessing and maintaining control over a valuable resource is considered normal dog behavior by behavior professionals. Most dogs have acceptable non-conflictive ways to show other dogs and humans they really want to keep something they've got, like turning their heads away, averting eye contact, repositioning their bodies, or simply walking off with the item. These signals are designed to avoid conflict, and even when a person *does* have to take a coveted item (although you'll want to be conscientious and strategic so as not to create a problem borne out of frustration), most dogs will relinquish it without making a fuss.

For dogs that *do* get into conflict over resources, we call this behavior *Resource Guarding*.

Today's educated dog behavior professional knows that it is not effective to meet a dog's resource guarding behavior head-on with coercion or aversive tactics. We don't know exactly why some dogs resource guard and some don't. Prenatal environment, genetics, early puppyhood experiences, and inadequate access to basic resources, may all play a role. Some scientists have suggested that resource guarding behaviors may originate in the same places in the brain as fear or anxiety, which is why if we react in a way that scares or physically hurts our dog, we can make matters worse.

#### **Common items dogs might guard:**

- "Found" items (socks, tissue dropped on the floor, trash from a bin)
- Food/food bowl
- Toys
- Spaces (resting place, someone's lap)
- Thresholds (doorways, hallways)
- Entire rooms
- Something another dog suddenly shows interest in

When a dog's resource guarding behavior is deemed undesirable or unsafe to other animals or people, it is important to work with a behavior consultant or qualified trainer who can help you recognize a dog's signals and respond appropriately while implementing a behavior modification plan.

#### **Fear and Anxiety**

Researchers learn more and more every day about the fear and anxiety that plagues so many of our pet dogs. As with humans, big inroads are being made into medications and behavior modification solutions to help these dogs, but there's still a lot we don't know.

What we do know, however, is that it is ineffective to treat a dog's fears with aversives, which only serve to compound problems. Because you're a human, your brain has the capability to rationalize, and you can tell yourself that even though you're afraid or feeling anxious, the "scary thing" or situation won't really hurt you. Dog brains are not built this way. A dog that is in an acute threat response, as in the case of a "scary visitor" or thunderstorm, is convinced that certain death is imminent. Punishing a dog in this state only serves to compound that fear, and it also violates the trust a dog has with you.

## Separation anxiety

True separation anxiety - characterized by our dog suffering what we would call a panic attack when we leave - is one of the hardest conditions we deal with in dog behavior.

*Work with a behavior consultant and your veterinarian to determine the scope of your dog's anxieties and to develop the best course of treatment.*

## Kids

As a general rule, dogs that are confident and resilient make the best pets for households with children.

- Consider it a red flag if your dog is *extremely frightened by* or *reacts aggressively* to your children or grandchildren.
- Don't allow children to engage in overly rambunctious play with dogs that haven't learned appropriate behavior around a child. It is our job as adults to teach our dogs how to be around our children.
- Teach children how to read a dog's consent cues
- Teach children about [Dog Safety for Kids](#)

## TRAINING

All dogs need to learn the skills required to navigate our human world. This keeps them safe. The skills your dog needs will be dictated by their breed type, age, temperament, learning history, and the environment around them; dogs living in the suburbs may need different skills than those living on a ranch.

For dogs with behavior problems, particularly dogs that struggle with fear or anxiety, *clarity* about what to do in certain situations is key. Clear cues in training are important.

Positive reinforcement training methods are useful in showing dogs what we want them to do. Training is focused on reinforcing/rewarding behaviors we like, and preventing and re-directing behaviors we don't like. *Keep in mind, behaviors we don't like are somehow being reinforced or the dog wouldn't do them.* De-sensitization and counter-conditioning are commonly used to help a dog that might have specific triggers.

A behavior consultant or trainer skilled in positive-reinforcement strategies will help develop a training plan for the skills you and your dog need to confidently navigate the world together.