

THE BIG PICTURE

by Hanne Grice Training & Behaviour



Tackling unwanted behaviour positively, and successfully

For more visit
www.doglistener.tv

This week my summer puppies course kicked off and the usual issues were raised, such as tackling play biting and jumping up. Something I like my clients to think about is how the undesirable behaviour is being reinforced?

Obviously as behaviour consultants it is our job to identify these things but it can really help clients' understanding when we discuss what reinforces behaviour. That is because what gets rewarded is likely to get repeated - even the bad stuff.

By working out where is the reinforcement you can then address how to remove it and focus on reinforcing other desirable behaviours instead.

However, that may be easier said than done where the reinforcement is internally and externally driven.

Internal and external reinforcement

For example, a dog that barks at others because he is fearful may be successful in driving that other dog away or the owner may pull their barking dog away. In either case space has been created so the external threat has been removed and that is highly rewarding. This can lead to internal reinforcement because the 'scary' thing has gone so the barking behaviour also provides emotional relief.

Hence, listing out all the possible internal and external reinforcers for the problem behaviour that is occurring helps when it comes to addressing how to remove them.

Then we need to consider the context in which the undesirable behaviour is occurring because what gets practiced can get better!

I had a recent case where the dog barked at other dogs on a walk. Upon client questioning it transpired he also barked at wildlife in the garden and when the owner got up from the sofa. In this case the barking behaviour occurred frequently and in varied locations but was only considered inappropriate when this was directed at others out and about.

In short, when speaking with my class this week, I encouraged them to look at the big picture. This means consider:

- *what is reinforcing the behaviour*
- *is it internal or external*
- *what is the context[s] to which the behaviour is happening*

That way the unwanted behaviour can be tackled much more appropriately, positively, and successfully

What gets practiced gets better!

