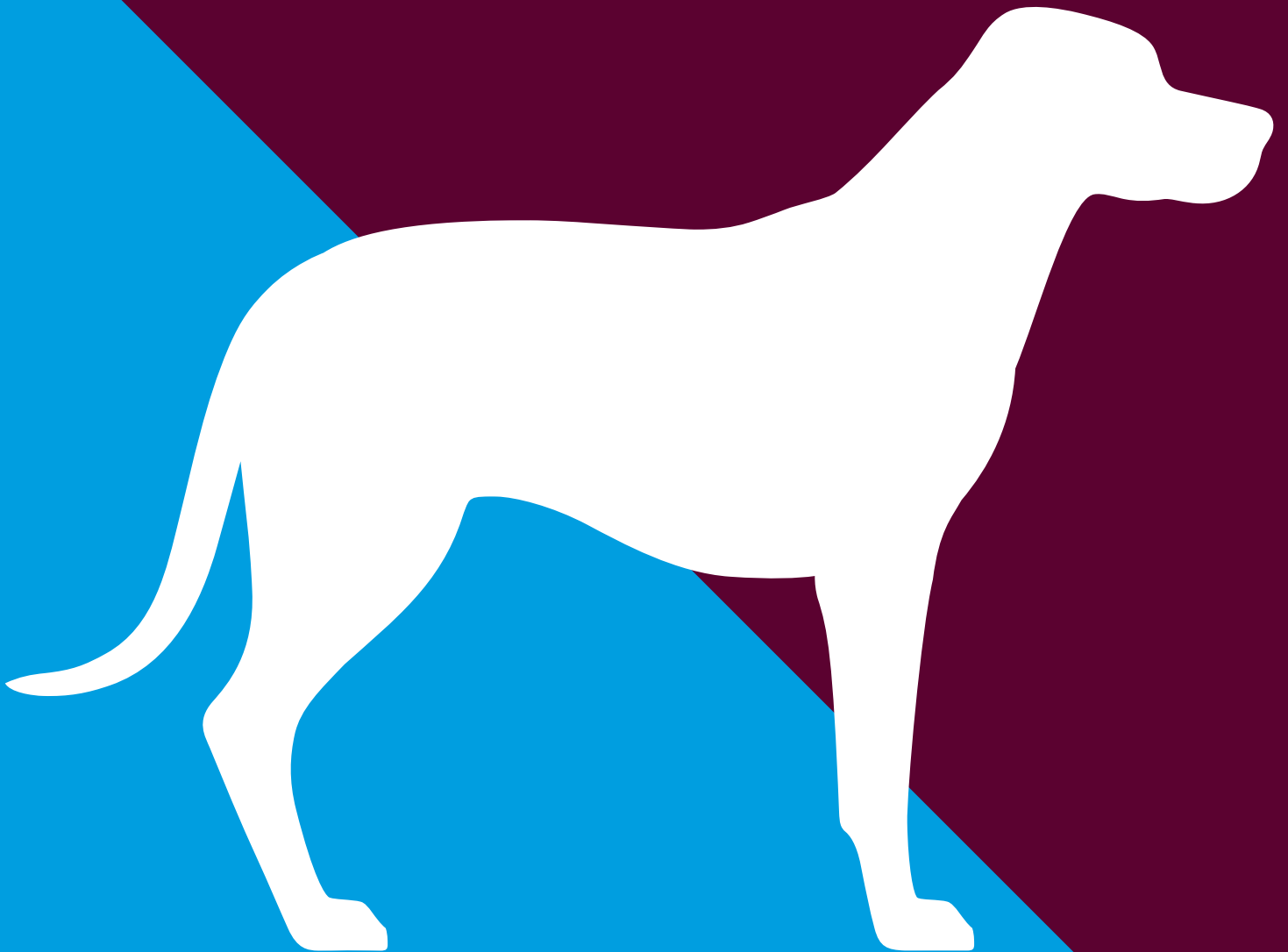




Canton of Zurich
Department of Health
Veterinary Office

Dog Training Theory



Introduction

Since 1 June 2025, new theoretical and practical dog courses have been mandatory in the canton of Zurich. Successful completion of the theory course and the corresponding test is compulsory not just for first-time dog owners, but also for anyone who has not owned a dog in more than ten years. The theory test must be completed by no later than two months after becoming a dog owner.

While this booklet provides insights into important topics relating to dogs that reflect the latest scientific findings, it does not claim to be a scientific work, even despite the extensive nature of the references provided.

It contains all the learning content that is relevant for passing the theory test. This includes both the content taught in the theory course and content that is covered in self-study. It is recommended that you read this booklet in advance of or while taking the practical course in order to achieve the practical learning objectives. The practical course is compulsory for all dog owners (not just first-time dog owners) as soon as they get a new dog. It also serves as a useful guide for all dog owners.

Clear, concise examples supplement the theoretical content of the booklet. Mrs Schweizer with Kiro and Mr Zürcher with Luna are fictitious dog owners and dogs with made-up names.

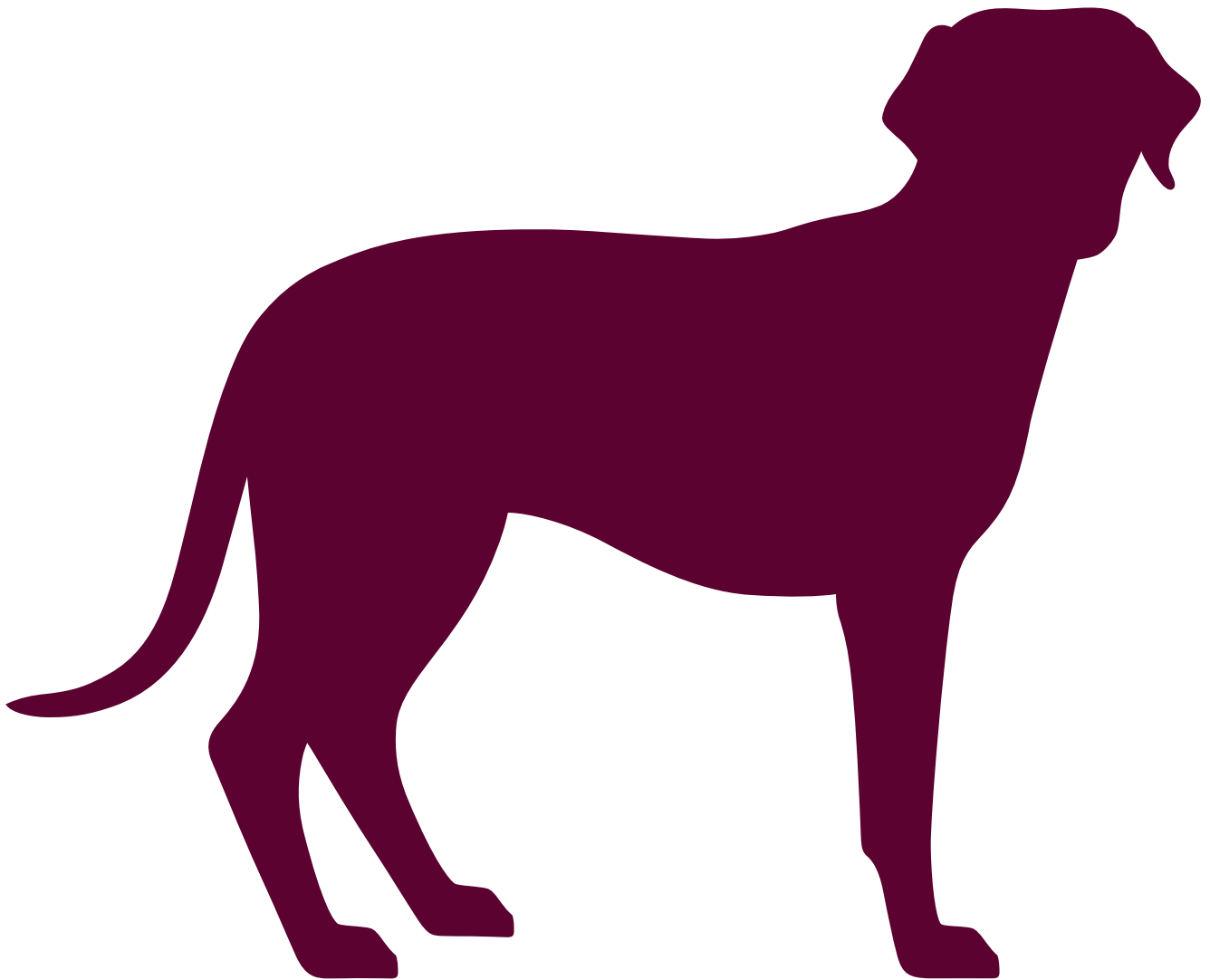
The booklet aims to inspire dog owners to read and learn more about dogs. There are also literature recommendations at the end of each chapter.

To make the learning content in this booklet easier to read and understand, its order, presentation and grouping do not correspond 1:1 with the document “Learning objectives and training content of the theoretical dog training, Section 10 of the Dog Ordinance (Hundeverordnung (HuV))”. The superscript numbers refer to the list of references at the end of the booklet.

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01

All about dogs



01.1

A dog's senses

Learning objectives

- **I know about the different senses a dog has.**
- **I know how a dog's senses differ compared to those of humans.**

Dogs have the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Dogs perceive the world differently to humans.

Sight

According to current knowledge, dogs' visual acuity is assumed to be three to four times worse than that of humans.¹ Dogs see objects closer than 30-50 cm in front of them as blurry, which is why they sniff around when pieces of food are very close to them, for example.²

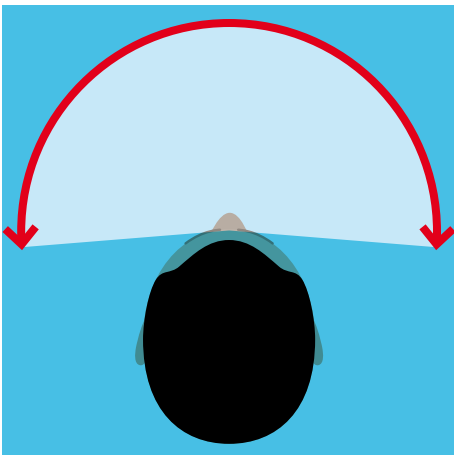
Dogs perceive movement much better than humans. They can detect small movements even at distances of almost one kilometre. This ability varies from breed to breed.³

Dogs see better than humans at dusk too. In complete darkness, however, dogs and humans see equally poorly.⁴

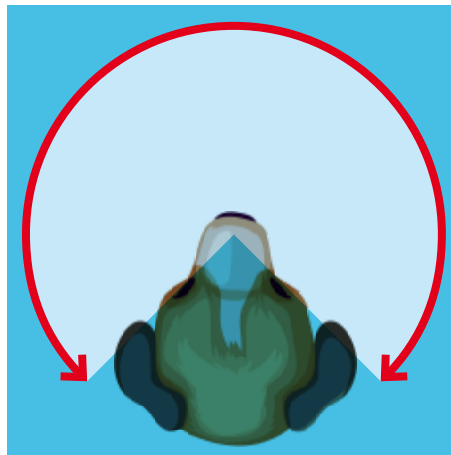
The field of vision

As a dog's eyes are located on the side of its head, they have a larger field of vision than humans. Without having to turn their heads, dogs can also see movements that take place to the side of or behind them.⁵

Dogs with a lot of hair on their heads, however, can have significantly impaired vision. Making sure that the hair around the eyes is shaved during grooming or that the excess hair is tied back is important so the dog can fully experience the world visually.



Human field of vision



Dog's field of vision

Colour perception

Dogs perceive colours differently to humans. They lack the light-sensing cells (cones) in the retina that allow the colour red to be seen. This makes them red-green colourblind, which is why dogs see a blue ball in green grass much better than a red ball.⁶



Human colour perception



Dog's colour perception

Hearing

While information on the hearing range of dogs differs across individual sources, dogs certainly hear in a wider frequency range than humans. Some sources say that dogs can hear up to 65,000 hertz (humans hear up to around 14,000 hertz).⁷

A dog's hearing is particularly sensitive to high frequencies. This means that dogs can hear sounds in the ultrasonic range that are imperceptible to humans.

Dogs can also hear sounds from very far away and are quite adept at distinguishing between them.

They can move their outer ears, directing their ears towards the source of the noise.⁸ Dog owners should be aware that dogs can hear noises (human voices, radio, television, household appliances, traffic noises, church bells, thunderstorms, fireworks, etc.) better than humans. They can react to noises with much more excitement or even fear as a result.

Just like in humans, a dog's sense of hearing can also decline with age. When teaching a dog the most important everyday cues, that makes working with visual signals (body language) and auditory signals (verbal cues) right from the start a good idea.

Touch

The sense of touch plays an important social and emotional role with dogs. Physical contact can be emotionally significant for dogs, with closeness and pleasant touch playing a particularly important role in forming bonds.

Dogs use their snouts to explore their environment. They have a large number of tactile hairs around their snout and above their eyes. These hairs, called vibrissae, fulfil important tasks as a tactile organ, providing protection and aiding the dog's sense of smell and ability to communicate.⁹

Taste and smell

The sense of smell is every dog's "strongest" sense. Dogs explore the world primarily with their nose.

Humans can hardly imagine how sensitive a dog's nose is, let alone how well dogs can smell. For example, dogs recognise the direction in which an odour trail is running on the ground.

There are reports of highly trained dogs successfully tracking a scent after several days, over long distances, with many distracting smells and on difficult terrain.¹⁰ A dog's sense of smell is extremely important to humans and is the subject of research because dogs are increasingly being used as sniffer dogs (by the police, military, customs, nature conservation and health services) to perform important tasks.¹¹

A dog's olfactory mucous membranes are twenty times thicker than those of humans. In addition, dogs have 125 to 300 million olfactory cells, while humans only have 5 to 10 million.¹² Of course, these figures vary according to breed type, size and head shape. Short-headed dogs (brachycephalic dogs) cannot perform to their full potential due to the narrowing of the upper airways and the breathing problems this causes.

A dog's sense of smell continues to develop throughout its life. In addition, smell processing can be improved through training.^{13, 14} This is particularly fascinating because a dog's other senses tend to weaken over the course of its life. The nose, on the other hand, is constantly producing new cells. Dogs love to use their nose. Interesting search tasks are therefore particularly recommended for keeping dogs occupied and stimulated in everyday life.

The vomeronasal organ

It is interesting to note that dogs with the vomeronasal organ (also known as Jacobson's organ) are equipped with a kind of "second nose". This organ is located in the palate, directly behind the upper incisors. Its existence explains why dogs sometimes lick certain spots and then smack their lips or drool. This behaviour can be clearly observed, for example, when a male dog examines the urine of a female dog in heat. He will then sometimes chatter his teeth, salivate heavily or foam at the mouth in order to process the smell.¹⁵

01.2

A dog's needs

Learning objectives

- **I know about a dog's basic needs and how to be a reliable social partner for dogs in everyday life.**
- **I can offer the dog a sensible amount of stimulation and activity and know what to look out for.**

Like humans, dogs are mammals with needs, emotions and sensitivities. The following illustration provides an overview of a dog's most important needs:

Basic biological needs - Food and water - Sleep and rest breaks - Exercise and mental stimulation - Toilet time - Physical well-being - Medical care	Safety and security - Ensuring a safe living environment - Freedom from anxiety and pain - Physical integrity - Daily structures, routines and understandable rules - Support and guidance
Social needs - Closeness and social interaction with humans: - Being part of a bonded group - Physical contact - Games and shared activities - Social contact with other dogs	Need for individuality and recognition - Freedom of choice within reasonable limits - Reasonable space for personal needs – - letting dogs be dogs - Successful challenges - Mental stimulation - Respectful and fair behaviour during training and in everyday life

Basic biological needs

The basic biological needs necessary for a dog's survival as well as for its physical and mental well-being must be met.

Food and water

Sufficient food and clean water are among these basic needs: dogs must always have access to fresh water. Every dog should be given food that is tailored to its individual needs. The amount and ingredients vary considerably depending on age, size, state of health and physical activity level. First-time dog owners and those returning to dog ownership should seek expert advice (nutrition advice, veterinary practice). A growth curve should also be calculated for puppies of larger breeds.

Sleep and rest

Dogs have a greater need for sleep and rest than humans. Observations of dogs living in the wild show that they rest and sleep for around 17 hours a day.¹⁶ For puppies as well as dogs that are old and sick, these phases can last up to 20 hours, depending on what they experience during the remaining 4 hours of the day.

The need for relaxation depends on the impressions and activities experienced. After exploring new places or after exciting activities, a dog needs more rest.

A resting place that is protected from external stimuli and the weather provides the necessary environment for your dog to relax. The extent to which a dog needs to be protected from stimuli (e.g. noise, moving stimuli such as children playing, pets, view of patio/garden) depends on many factors. If a dog generally does not rest at home or does not rest enough, the possible causes should be investigated. Professional help can be invaluable here.

Exercise

In addition to periods of sleep and rest, dogs must also be given adequate opportunities for exercise and physical and mental stimulation. The amount of exercise required depends on the breed, age and health of the dog. To satisfy a dog's curiosity and exploratory behaviour, walks with sufficient opportunities for exploration (e.g. sniffing, observing, wandering around) are important. Dog owners should give their dogs sufficient time for this and a larger lead radius. If possible, dogs should also be able to run freely in open areas to satisfy their need for exercise.

Familiar walking routes and daily routines give dogs a sense of security. Getting to know new environments encourages exploratory behaviour in dogs (provided they do not have anxiety issues), but can also lead to increased excitement and tension ([see Chapter 03.3](#)).

Toilet time

A quiet, nearby toilet area is advantageous. This is particularly important for puppies so that they learn to relieve themselves outdoors. It also makes sense for sick or older dogs to have a familiar place nearby where they can relieve themselves quickly. You can allocate a section of the garden for this purpose, to which you accompany your dog.

Physical well-being

Dog owners should learn about the individual grooming techniques needed to care for their dog's coat, ears, teeth and claws and put them into practice. Touching and handling different parts of the dog's body is integral to this; it must be practised with adolescent dogs and made pleasant for the dog ([see Chapter 03.3](#)). Regular veterinary checks, vaccinations and deworming help ensure that a dog's life is healthy and pain-free.

Safety and security

Every dog has a strong need for security and freedom from pain and fear. Dogs feel secure when they have choices and do not feel helpless or vulnerable (loss of control). Dog owners should organise life with their dog in a way that meets the dog's need for security and physical integrity: they should protect their dog as far as possible from dangers and situations that the dog perceives as dangerous, and provide it with a safe living environment with predictable, meaningful rules, structures and rituals. Habits give dogs a secure framework for their everyday life.

Rules

Peaceful coexistence always requires everybody involved to adhere to rules. Frequently, however, people's expectations are not in line with dogs' natural behaviours and needs: For example, people expect dogs to walk on a short, loose lead, while dogs actually want to investigate interesting places with their noses and run from one tuft of grass to the next.

Rules and the associated behaviour, such as walking on a loose lead, should be introduced through friendly, step-by-step training ([see Chapter 02](#)).

In situations where a dog's level of training is not yet sufficient for everyday life, dog owners should know how to help themselves through the use of suitable aids and management techniques ([see Chapter 03.1](#)).

Social needs

Social needs primarily include the need for closeness and the need for social interaction with social partners. A dog's most important social partners are its humans. Many dogs also have a need for social contact with their own kind, i.e. other dogs.

Social interactions with other dogs

Given the high density of dogs in Switzerland, one important training goal is to ensure that dogs can walk past unfamiliar dogs in a relaxed manner. Dogs do not have to greet and sniff every dog they meet, let alone play with them. Many dogs are even overwhelmed in these kinds of situations.

It is generally a good idea to teach your dog from an early age that just because another dog appears, it does not need to go up to it. The aim of training is for dogs to be able to walk past other dogs in a relaxed manner or wait with their owner. People can then talk to each other to find out whether their dogs are capable of good social interaction – or whether they're not a good fit and avoiding direct contact might be better.

Joint walks or other activities with good dog friends fully meet the need for social contact with other dogs.

On walks, it is important not only to keep your own dog's needs in mind, but also to respect the needs of other people and their dogs (see Chapter 03.4): There are many dogs that find contact with unfamiliar dogs stressful for a variety of reasons. These dogs have no desire to interact with other dogs and need sufficient distance. With patience and trust, however, beautiful dog friendships can still develop over time.

Social interactions with humans

Social interactions with human social partners mean living together in a family unit, where closeness, physical contact, play and shared activities are part of everyday life. Such attention enables dogs to build trust with their human social partners.

For a trusting and secure bond, it is important that dogs experience their humans as reliable and stable. Only then can humans be a reliable, trustworthy source of security for their dogs, accompanying them through life with foresight and care. In problematic situations, the human supports the dog as a social partner, e.g. by creating distance from the problematic stimulus.

Clear rules provide dogs with certainty and can be taught without punishment. These rules are implemented in everyday life in a fair, consistent and friendly manner.

Dogs are social animals, so it is unnatural for them to be separated from their humans.¹⁷ Being left alone must be practised in small steps and carefully so that the dog feels safe and understands that its human will return (see Chapter 03.3). Only then can dogs be left alone for a foreseeable period of time. How long this is depends on the individual dog. The rest of the time, the dog should be able to stay close to its humans.

Individuality and recognition

Dogs and humans are both mammals. Recent research has shown that their brains have many similarities.^{18, 19} It is therefore assumed that dogs experience emotions similar to those of humans, such as fear, joy, love, anger or frustration.²⁰

It follows that it is important for a dog's psychological well-being that it is able to make its own choices to a reasonable extent and can count on being treated with love and respect.

A dog's self-confidence grows through successfully mastered challenges and recognition from its human. Dogs should be perceived, encouraged and supported as individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses.

Mental stimulation

Dogs are intelligent animals, and mental stimulation helps to ensure that a dog's life is balanced and happy. The type and level of activity depends on the breed, age, stage of development, level of training, health and other factors such as the ambient temperature or time of day.

Less is often more. Therefore, it is usually better to train short sequences several times rather than in fewer, longer sessions. Finding the right level of mental stimulation for each individual dog is important ([see Chapter 03.3](#)).

Dogs love to master small challenges, whether these are cognitive or motor tasks, or involve using their nose: tracking down/searching for food is a fulfilling activity for dogs and can be turned into a food search game. Learning tricks such as taking off socks, giving a paw, curtsying or weaving around people's legs is also a varied way to keep them busy. Challenges associated with acquiring new skills are particularly valuable.

Dog schools and clubs offer various activities and dog sports, such as mantrailing, tracking, sniffer dog training, dummy training, lunging, trick school, hoopers, agility or social groups. It is worth looking at these offers (on a trial basis) to find out which activities are fun for human and dog alike. If attention is paid to the dog's health and the training is done without pressure, using rewards and motivation, it will be fun for everyone involved and help to foster a stronger bond between dog and human.

More about this topic

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01.3 Behavioural development

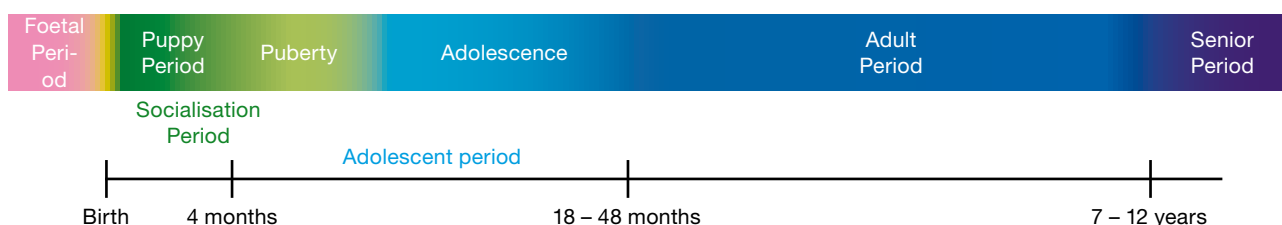
Learning objectives

- I can define the key periods in a dog's development and recognise the sensitive periods during puppyhood, puberty and adolescence.
- I am aware of the physical changes that occur during puberty and the possible changes in behaviour during this time.
- I know what the term "socialisation" means, and I understand that dogs need opportunities to get to know other living beings – different types of dogs, people and animals – in a measured way: this allows dogs to learn to classify them positively and practise communication.
- I can structure the dog's daily routine in such a way that it receives stimulation appropriate to its age and individuality through good daily habits and measured stimuli.
- I know that overwhelming a dog can lead to unwanted sensitisation and that this can be avoided by taking a careful approach and allowing sufficient breaks.
- I am aware that inadequate or inappropriate socialisation and/or environmental influences can lead to behavioural problems.

Developmental stages at a glance

A dog's development can be divided into different periods: ²¹

Period	Age
Foetal period	Before birth
Puppy period	Birth to 16 weeks
Adolescent period (puberty and adolescence)	16 weeks until social maturity (approx. 18 to 48 months)
Adult period	Social maturity up to the senior period (7 to 12 years)
Senior period	Old dog until end of life



Foetal period/prenatal influences

The gestation period lasts approximately 63 days. The mother dog should be healthy and feel comfortable. Negative influences such as stress, poor housing conditions, inadequate nutrition or anxiety-inducing situations etc. have an adverse effect on development.²²

Puppy period

The puppy period lasts from birth to 16 weeks. It is divided into the following sub-periods:

Newborn period (from birth to 10/14 days)

Newborn puppies are dependent on their mother in many ways: they are blind, virtually deaf and unable to regulate their body temperature. The mother dog stimulates her puppies to urinate and defecate by licking them. The newborn puppies can crawl to find their mother's teats.²³ If a mother dog behaves lovingly and caringly towards her puppies, they will be less anxious and more capable of learning later in life.^{24, 25}

Transitional period (10/13 to 20/21 days)

Now the senses begin to develop fully and the puppy can move with increasing agility: its eyes open and its hearing becomes fully functional.²⁶ The environment therefore has a greater influence on the puppy. It can also defecate and urinate independently and maintain its body temperature.

For a dog to develop optimally, it needs a varied environment, plenty of sleep and measured, mild stress during puppyhood. It is therefore advisable, for example, to hold it in your hands, hold it in different body positions, stroke it, expose it to cool temperatures for a short time or rub its paws with cotton buds.^{27, 28, 29}

Socialisation period (4 to 12/14 weeks old)

This sensitive period sets the course for the dog's future life. Socialisation means getting to know different social partners such as different people and other dogs.³⁰

During this time, emotional experiences have a long-term impact that lasts a lifetime.³¹ This applies to both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. To ensure that puppies grow up as anxiety-free as possible, they should be socialised sufficiently during this period and accustomed to all kinds of environmental stimuli. If a puppy shows signs of severe anxiety, it is recommended to seek professional help.

Socialisation with dogs

Puppies should get to know friendly dogs of different appearances, i.e. sniff each other, go for walks together, play and rest together. Dogs practise body language and communication through play. They also learn bite inhibition in the process. It is also advisable to teach puppies in a friendly manner that not every dog needs to be greeted or asked to play.

Socialisation with people

Getting to know different people (gender, age, appearance, skin colour, stature, current condition) is important for a relaxed coexistence with humans. Encounters with children must be closely supervised to ensure that both sides experience them as positive.

Socialisation with/habituation to other animal species

To prevent fear of or aggression towards other animal species, it is a good idea to allow your puppy to have relaxed encounters with these animals.³² Careful, controlled contact with other pets in the same household, such as cats, and getting the dog used to seeing other animals, such as farm animals, are recommended here.³³

Habituation to environmental stimuli

The socialisation period is also the time when the puppy should get used to all kinds of environmental stimuli that are characteristic of its future environment ([see Chapter 02.2](#)). Habituation must be carried out carefully and includes, for example:

- Everyday noises: street noise, train noises, church bells, televisions, music systems, vacuum cleaners and other household appliances
- Sudden intense noises: thunder, fireworks, gunshots
- Visual stimuli and movements: fluttering ribbons, rubbish bins, passing vehicles such as cars, bicycles and scooters
- Physical perceptions: unsteady ground, different floor surfaces, heights, movement determined by others such as being carried or driven, confinement, e.g. in a travel crate
- Driving a car, travelling by train/tram

Problems due to lack of or inadequate socialisation

If puppies are not given any or sufficient opportunities for encounters and habituation during the socialisation period, they are more likely to experience environmental anxiety and stress later in life.³⁴ Everyday environmental stimuli and encounters with people and/or other dogs can then overwhelm the dog and trigger behavioural problems such as fear or aggression.³⁵ Learning experiences during the socialisation period must therefore be designed in such a way that prepare the puppy as well as possible for its future environment and life.

Example

If a puppy comes from a farm, it is used to a rural environment. If it is going to live in the city in the future, it is important to carefully acclimatise it to this new, lively environment over several weeks during the socialisation period.

Overwhelming during the socialisation period

Overwhelming a puppy during the socialisation period can also lead to future problems. New impressions that are too loud, too big, too close or too intense can cause the puppy to become anxious ([see Chapter 02.2](#)). Because of this, puppies should not be overwhelmed.³⁶

Example

The puppy meets a crowd of children and is simultaneously being stroked and picked up from all sides. It feels besieged and overwhelmed.

Influence of breeders; date of acquisition

The first weeks of a dog's life have a strong influence on it. Breeders therefore bear a great responsibility: they must create the best possible environment for their puppies.³⁷ Anyone buying a puppy should choose the breeder carefully.

Puppies that are separated from their mother before they are eight weeks old later develop health and psychological problems.³⁸ The law therefore allows adoption from eight weeks old at the earliest.³⁹

The first days in their new home

After adoption, the puppy's further development is in the hands of its owner.

The new home

The home should be made puppy-proof even before the puppy is adopted. Sources of danger such as cables, houseplants or staircases must be well secured ([see Chapter 04.3](#)).

Management techniques, i.e. all techniques that serve to prevent the puppy from displaying undesired behaviour, prevent undesired behaviour and situations that are dangerous for the puppy. For example, shoes, remote controls and similar temptations should be put away and suitable toys or chews provided instead ([see Chapter 03.1](#)).

A sheltered, cosy retreat – such as an open folding box with cosy blankets – should also be made appealing to the puppy: hiding food or toys there now and again are a good way of doing this.

New experiences and daily routine

Dog owners should gradually familiarise their puppies with everyday stimuli without overwhelming or frightening them. Puppies should learn that the world is not a dangerous place, that they can feel safe and that they can trust their owner. The motto here is “less is more”. Every puppy needs ample calm and a sense of security, especially in the early days after adoption. Familiar daily routines from its previous home, such as feeding and resting times, familiar food or a cloth that smells of its siblings and the mother, will help the puppy to settle in.

The puppy can then gradually be shown the “big wide world”. Dog owners are responsible for introducing puppies to appropriate challenges (e.g. exploring a rustling, empty shopping bag or observing the street outside the front door). Small successes, such as the puppy daring to play with the empty, rustling bag, give the puppy self-confidence and reinforce its curiosity.

On walks, puppies need plenty of time to observe and explore their environment with all their senses. Here, too, “quality before quantity” applies, i.e. the number of impressions is less important than their quality. This may mean that the puppy is given enough time to process new impressions and store them as familiar experiences.

Rest and sleep

Puppies need a lot of rest and sleep – up to 20 hours a day. After exciting or tiring experiences, they often find it difficult to calm down. Here, humans can help puppies to relax by modelling calm and relaxation (see Chapter 02.3). As social creatures, puppies sleep best close to their humans, even at night. This allows dog owners to monitor the puppy’s condition at all times and respond to signs of anxiety, the need for physical contact or toilet time, for example.

House training

Newborn puppies cannot yet control their bladder or sphincter.⁴⁰ It can take weeks or even months for this function to develop properly. The puppy should be taken outside quickly to a low-stimulus place in the following situations and calmly praised for doing its business:

- After waking up
- After eating and drinking
- After playing
- After excitement
- Behaviour such as intensive sniffing on the ground, hectic activity, turning around, etc.
- In addition, every two hours during the day

If dog owners keep a close eye on their puppies, accidents can usually be avoided.

If something does happen, however, the following applies:

- If an accident is discovered in the home, any reaction will be too late. Clean up calmly; do not punish the puppy.
- If the puppy is caught in the act, gently pick it up so that it stops what it is doing and quickly take it outside to its toilet area.

Scolding or punishment is not appropriate. The dog could develop a fear of people and/or learn to do its business when people are not looking.

Bite inhibition

The term “bite inhibition” means that a dog can control and regulate its biting force.

This is very important in social interaction. Bite inhibition is not innate, but is practised and learned in the first few months of life through social interactions with other dogs and people.⁴¹ If situations frequently arise in which a puppy bites, prompt professional help is required.

Participation in a well-organised puppy group

A well-organised puppy group gives puppies an opportunity to practise being together and communicating with different dogs. Meeting other dogs and people should be a positive experience for puppies. In addition to the social interactions with other puppies, training with “their” human in a happy and focused manner despite the presence of other dogs is an important learning experience.⁴²

Adolescent period (puberty and adolescence, approx. 16 weeks to 48 months)

Once teething is complete at around 4 to 7 months,⁴³ the adolescent period begins with the development of sexual maturity (puberty), followed by adolescence (development towards social maturity). Small-breed dogs develop more quickly than large-breed dogs. Throughout this entire period, the dog matures physically (e.g. size, chest circumference, musculature).

The term “puberty” refers to the physical process that takes place up to the point at which the animal reaches sexual maturity: male dogs begin to lift one hind leg when urinating and develop an interest in the opposite sex. Female dogs come into heat for the first time.

Sexual maturity is not the same as social maturity. Full development of social maturity takes until the end of adolescence. Only then is brain development, especially of the cerebrum, complete.⁴⁴

The cerebrum is responsible for controlling attention, regulating emotions and controlling impulses, among other things. Its restructuring is evident in the fact that adolescent dogs react more quickly to stimuli, are less able to concentrate, become more independent and react more emotionally: young “disobedient” dogs are neither disrespectful nor do they want to provoke their owners – they are often simply unable to do what is asked of them.⁴⁵ This is why the adolescent stage is often perceived as demanding.

During adolescence, young dogs need a lot of predictability, i.e. clear, consistent routines and understandable rules. Meanwhile, friendly impulse control training remains important. A good mix of training, management techniques – e.g. a lead – and understanding will help you get through the challenging weeks. If necessary, take a few steps back in training (fewer distractions, simpler exercises). Getting enough sleep and rest is always important.⁴⁶

We often hear about so-called “anxiety stages” in adolescent dogs. There is debate over whether these stages actually exist. The physical changes and brain maturation processes that occur throughout adolescence can increase a dog’s stress levels. Unfavourable events can have a greater impact, for example by causing dogs to develop anxiety problems more quickly.⁴⁷

If an adolescent dog displays frequent and/or severe anxiety, it is advisable to seek professional help.

Behavioural problems in adolescent dogs must not be ignored under any circumstances. They do not disappear into thin air once this period is over. Dog owners should consult a specialist in behavioural medicine and place emphasis on reward-based and needs-oriented training.

“Stifling” undesired behaviour with punishments does not solve problems, but can actually exacerbate them (see Chapter 01.7 and Chapter 02.6).⁴⁸

Adult period

After reaching social maturity at around 2 years of age, the dog is an adult. The length of the adult period depends on the individual and the breed. Larger and heavier dogs usually have a shorter life expectancy.

Senior period

The start of this period is individual and depends on the breed and size of the dog. It usually begins between the ages of 7 and 12.

Hearing and eyesight often deteriorate. As diseases and age-related problems such as osteoarthritis become more likely with the onset of the senior period, regular veterinary check-ups such as blood tests or ultrasound examinations are recommended. Very old dogs can suffer from dementia and/or incontinence. Dog owners should always take the changed needs of an old dog into consideration.

More about this topic

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01.4

Introduction to dog body language

Learning objectives

- **I recognise a normal expression with a relaxed posture.**
- **I am familiar with the differences in expression (body language and behaviour) of different types of dogs and possible misunderstandings in dog-dog communication.**
- **I am familiar with the most important characteristics of how a dog uses its head to express itself (ear position, corners of the mouth, bridge of the nose, eyes).**
- **I am familiar with the most important characteristics of how a dog uses its body to express itself (body tension, tail position, body's centre of gravity, coat changes, body axis in relation to another dog).**

Dogs communicate largely through their body language. However, smells, touch and vocalisations are also part of their diverse communication behaviour.

The importance of body language for dog owners

It is very important for dog owners to read and understand dog body language. Like any language, it has to be learnt. This knowledge makes it possible to assess the dog's emotions and anticipate what it will do next, and to provide appropriate support if necessary. This helps defuse conflict situations at an early stage. Understanding body language also helps assess approaching dogs when on walks, for example.

To deepen your knowledge of dog body language, we recommend further study of the subject. Corresponding book recommendations can be found at the end of [Chapter 01.5](#). Recognising the many small, fleeting body language signals as well as the overall expression (display) takes a lot of practice.

Observation as opposed to interpretation

The first step is to observe and recognise body language, with all its subtleties, accurately and without judgement. For example: "The dog is cowering and tucking its tail between its legs". Only on this basis can an interpretation be attempted: "The dog is afraid". The interpretation should take into account not only the dog and its behaviour, but also the situation as a whole.

Observations might not always be interpreted in a way that corresponds with the truth of the situation. People are often quick to jump to conclusions and sometimes misinterpret a dog's behaviour, as in the following example: "The dog was home alone and deliberately broke things to get revenge". Sometimes people attribute motives to dogs that are highly unlikely to occur in dogs, e.g. a guilty conscience or a desire for revenge.⁴⁹ If these assumptions form the basis for punitive measures, this is extremely unfair to the dog.

Differences in expressive behaviour

Through selective breeding, i.e. selection for different specialisations, the coat, body shape and, above all, head shape of different dogs have developed differently. This has led to the development of different external appearances, known as phenotypes, in dogs. Today, there are over 350 dog breeds recognised by the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI) and countless mixed breeds created by crossing different breeds.



Here are just a few examples of different phenotypes.

Breeding has led to different tail positions, among other things.⁵⁰ These differences often lead to misunderstandings. For example, tails carried high do not always indicate excitement, imposing or threatening behaviour, and tails carried low do not always indicate insecurity or fear.⁵¹ Dog owners should be aware of these differences. Ideally, dogs learn this during their socialisation period with different types of dogs.

Examples of how different types of dogs carry their tails



Belgian Shepherd
Shepherd-type dogs carry their tails low.



Whippet
Greyhound-like dogs carry their tails between their legs.



Airedale Terrier
Terrier-type dogs carry their tails high.



Shiba Inu
Spitz-type dogs carry their tails curled next to or over their backs.

Communication restrictions

There are dogs that resemble wolves visually: e.g. short fur, erect ears, tail. This gives them a wide range of communication options.

It is difficult to read the body language of dogs with long and/or thick fur, such as Briards or Poodles, or dogs with very short heads and/or no tail, such as Pugs or French Bulldogs. This is hard not only for humans, but dogs as well. Typical examples of dogs with communication limitations are Pugs and all types of bulldogs.

Examples



This French Bulldog is observing its environment. Its eyes and ears are directed forwards. It carries the majority of its body weight on its forelimbs. It lacks a tail, so communication with the tail is not possible.

A rather insecure dog that does not have much experience with this type of dog could feel threatened and react accordingly.⁵²



This Lagotto has a lot of fur on its face, which significantly restricts its field of vision (see [Chapter 01.1](#)) and therefore its ability to communicate. It has problems not only sending signals, but also receiving them.



This is also a Lagotto, but with the hair around its eyes shaved. This allows it to utilise its full field of vision and communicate better.

Reading body language

To read a dog's body language, you must always look at the entire dog, i.e. from the tip of its nose to its tail (display). If the observation is limited to individual body parts, e.g. the tail, there is a risk of misinterpretation. The following things are important to know:

- A dog's body language signals can change in a flash.
- Individuals of the same breed may communicate differently.

In particular, it is important to pay attention to the following:

Head

- Nasal bridge
- Eyes/gaze
- Corners of the mouth
- Forehead
- Ears

Body

- Head position
- Back hair
- Tail position
- Centre of gravity
- Body tension
- Body axis (orientation towards people or other dogs)



An encounter with mutual sniffing of the anal/genital area



A tense encounter with potential for conflict, in something referred to as the “T-position”

The subject of “dog body language” is an extremely broad field. Within the scope of the compulsory dog training course, it is only possible to cover four “basic types” in broad terms: neutral, alert, fearful and aggressive. Dog owners are therefore well advised to educate themselves further by reading specialised literature.

The neutral posture/normal expression (depending on the type of dog)

- Centre of gravity balanced
- Relaxed posture, soft muscles
- Mouth relaxed, can also be slightly open
- Relaxed gaze
- Head gently raised, slightly above the topline
- Ears in neutral position
- Tail in neutral position



Examples of neutral postures



The posture of an attentive dog

- Centre of gravity shifted slightly forwards
- A little more body tension
- Mouth loosely closed, can also be slightly open
- A focused gaze
- Eyes wide open
- Head usually slightly higher
- Ears erect or pointing forwards
- Tail usually slightly higher, calm or slowly wagging



Examples of attentive dogs



The posture of an anxious dog⁵³

- Centre of gravity shifted backwards
- Crouching posture (bent joints), the dog makes itself appear smaller, pos
- Mouth closed, lips pulled back
- Gaze may be averted
- Eyes wide open or almost closed
- Head low, mostly below the topline
- Ears pointing backwards or downwards
- Tail below the topline or even tucked in (depending on the type of dog)



Depending on how fearful the dog is, its body posture also varies, for example in cases of mild fear (drawing above) and severe fear (drawing below).

Examples of dogs showing fearful behaviour



Body posture during aggressive behaviour (threatening behaviour)⁵⁴

A distinction is made between defensive and offensive aggressive behaviour. Body language differs depending on whether the dog is afraid and displaying aggressive behaviour as a result of that fear (defensive aggression) or whether it feels safe and is annoyed (offensive aggression).

Offensive aggressive behaviour (secure threatening)

- Centre of gravity shifted forwards
- Muscles very tense
- Legs locked out, stiff stance or gait
- Bridge of nose curled
- Corners of the mouth small and rounded: lips pulled up, front teeth visible
- Staring, gaze fixed on the other individual (threatening stare)
- Eyes open, wide and round
- Head above the topline
- Ears pointing upwards and forwards
- Back hair ruffled at the nape of the neck
- Tail high and stiff or slowly wagging
(varies greatly depending on the type of dog)



Defensive aggressive behaviour (insecure threatening)

- Centre of gravity to the rear
- Muscles very tense
- Joints bent
- Bridge of nose curled
- Longer mouth gap: lips pulled back, teeth visible
- Staring, gaze fixed on the other individual (threatening stare)
- Eyes large, white often visible at the edge of the eye
- Head below the topline
- Ears close to the head and/or pointing backwards
- Hair bristling on the back of the neck and on the croup
- Tail at or below the topline and stiff (varies greatly depending on the type of dog) or even tucked in



Example of a defensively aggressive dog (left) and an offensively aggressive dog (right)



01.5

The body language of emotion and excitement

Learning objectives

- **I know what play behaviour is and can recognise the corresponding signals.**
- **I am familiar with the four strategies (“4 Fs”) that dogs use to react in threatening situations and can give examples.**
- **I can recognise the “4 Fs” and can therefore avoid misinterpreting my dog’s behaviour.**
- **I understand the term “ladder of aggression” and recognise the importance of subtle signals.**
- **I know what calming signals are and can recognise them.**
- **I know how dogs greet each other in a friendly way.**
- **I recognise stress signals and displacement behaviour.**
- **I know what avoidance behaviour is and can recognise the corresponding signals.**
- **I know what threatening behaviour is and can recognise the corresponding signals.**
- **I know the differences between play behaviour, hunting behaviour and aggressive behaviour.**

The following section focuses on body language communication when excited and emotions during play, the “4 Fs” and the ladder of aggression.

The transitions from one category to another are usually fluid, which is why a behaviour cannot always be clearly assigned to one category. That makes it important to always observe the dog’s overall expression (display) in order to correctly assess behaviour in relation to the situation.

Play behaviour

A pleasant, balanced playfulness is often observed in dogs that know each other well, like each other and have already built up mutual trust.

Typical signs of play behaviour^{55, 56}

- Exaggerated movements (excessive movement)
- Lowering of the forebody (play bow)
- Relaxed muscles
- Soft and exaggerated facial features, wide open muzzle, relaxed corners of the mouth (playful expression)
- Alternating roles (e.g. switching between “hunter” and “hunted”)
- The physically superior dog holds back and adapts to its playmate
- There will be regular (possibly very short) breaks

Examples of dogs playing



In a real game, all the dogs involved are in play mode. It is not always play behaviour when dogs run across a meadow together: people often confuse prey-catching behaviour (hunting behaviour) with play behaviour, or play turns into imposing or aggressive behaviour.

It is important to recognise this early so that help can be given to dogs that are feeling uncomfortable (e.g. because they are being chased).⁵⁷

Possible signs that it is not a game (any more)

- Excessive hunting games (the “hunter” actually exhibits hunting behaviour and/or the “hunted” is actually fleeing)
- Mounting
- Pawing
- Laying head on another dog
- Interaction becomes faster and rougher, excitement increases
- Bullying

The four conflict strategies (“4 Fs”)

Each dog has its own individual perception of what constitutes a threat. Dogs react to threatening situations with four strategies.⁵⁸ These four strategies are labelled with terms that all start with the letter F, which is why they are simply called the “4 Fs”:

- Freeze
- Fiddle about
- Flight
- Fight⁵⁹

Behaviours of all four strategies can be exhibited in gradations from weak to pronounced.

The strategy can also change within milliseconds. It is important for dog owners to be aware of the “4 Fs” and to recognise when their dog is displaying behaviour associated with one of these strategies.

Freeze

The dog suddenly stands still, freezes and is barely or no longer responsive. This may be accompanied by a brief or prolonged fixation on the object or creature perceived as threatening.

It is not uncommon for people to wrongly interpret this freezing as “stubbornness”. In fact, the dog is stuck (frozen) at that moment and is unable to go any further. If a dog shows the first signs of freezing, such as a fixed gaze and/or stiffened muscles, supportive measures may be appropriate: for example, you can create more distance between the dog and the threatening object or creature.⁶⁰

Not every prolonged observation of a stimulus is to be interpreted as freezing: dogs observe their environment attentively in order to gather valuable information that satisfies their needs. They do this with less physical tension than when they are “freezing” and remain responsive. Dogs should be given the opportunity to make these kinds of observations.

Examples

- Kiro encounters other free-roaming dogs. Suddenly they are all standing around him. He feels threatened and freezes.
- Luna is in the dog parlour and feels uncomfortable. She sits frozen and endures the grooming with an uneasy feeling.

Fiddle about

The dog falls into often exaggerated, frantic clowning around in an attempt to cover up a difficult situation that it finds overwhelming. Examples include jumping up or biting the lead.

This “fiddling about” is often misinterpreted by humans as play behaviour or joy. It is not always easy to tell the difference: It requires closer observation to recognise that the dog is very tense and becoming increasingly agitated. The dog is not in a happy, relaxed mood, as would be the case with play behaviour.⁶¹

Examples

- Kiro is being treated in physiotherapy and feels constricted. He throws himself on his back and kicks his legs.
- Guests arrive at the house and Luna feels overwhelmed. She jumps up at the guests, runs around wildly in circles and can’t calm down.

Flight

Flight serves to increase the dog’s distance from the stimulus it perceives as threatening.⁶² It does not necessarily have to run far away, because “flight” can also mean retreating within a small space (see avoidance behaviour later in this chapter).

Dog owners should bear in mind that in many conflict situations, dogs are unable to keep their desired distance, for example because they are prevented from doing so by a lead or spatial restrictions.

Examples

- Kiro is pulling his head away from the hand that wants to stroke him because he feels threatened by it.
- Luna is leaning to one side on the treatment table to distance herself from the vet.

Fight

The dog displays threatening and/or aggressive behaviour. Like the attempts to flee in the “flight” strategy, the “fight” strategy is also intended to increase the distance from the threat: The dog tries to keep the threat away or chase it away. It usually starts with subtle signals such as pulling back its lips, growling, barking or biting the air (feigned attack). If these defensive attempts are unsuccessful, the next step is to attack (see ladder of aggression below).⁶³

Examples

- A dog has an inflamed ear that needs to be cleaned daily. Initially, the dog raises its lips and growls. As the treatment is continued anyway, the dog snaps at the hand the next time it touches its ear.
- A dog is afraid of other dogs but is nevertheless led close to them. Because it is on a lead, it cannot get away and shows its need for distance by behaving aggressively.

Which of the “4 F” strategies a dog displays in a given situation depends on the following factors:⁶⁴

- Innate characteristics (genetics)
- Previous learning experiences (which strategy has proven successful so far?)
- Current physical condition (well-being, pain, agitation)
- Situation (what or who is the dog dealing with?)

Previous learning experiences play a particularly important role. If a dog is repeatedly unsuccessful with the three peaceful strategies (freeze, fiddle about, flight), the likelihood that it will resort to “fight” in future situations increases.

Since “fight” is loud and unmistakable, the opponent is likely to respond by increasing the distance between them. In this way, “fight” gives the dog the experience of finally having found a solution and keeping the threat at bay. This is a great relief for the dog (good feeling = reward; see Chapter 02).

There is a likelihood that it will exhibit “fight” behaviour again in a similar situation. That means dog owners should not let things progress this far and take supportive measures at the first signs of “freeze”, “fiddle about” or “flight”, such as increasing the distance, changing direction, moving to the side/out of the way or walking in a wide arc.

If the dog frequently displays the “4 F” behaviours, it is advisable to seek professional help as soon as possible ([see Chapter 01.7](#)).

Displacement behaviour

It is possible for a dog to be torn between different courses of action, for example between increasing and decreasing distance. It may then display behaviour that appears inappropriate in the situation (e.g. scratching, jumping up and biting the lead). Colloquially, this is referred to as displacement behaviour.⁶⁵

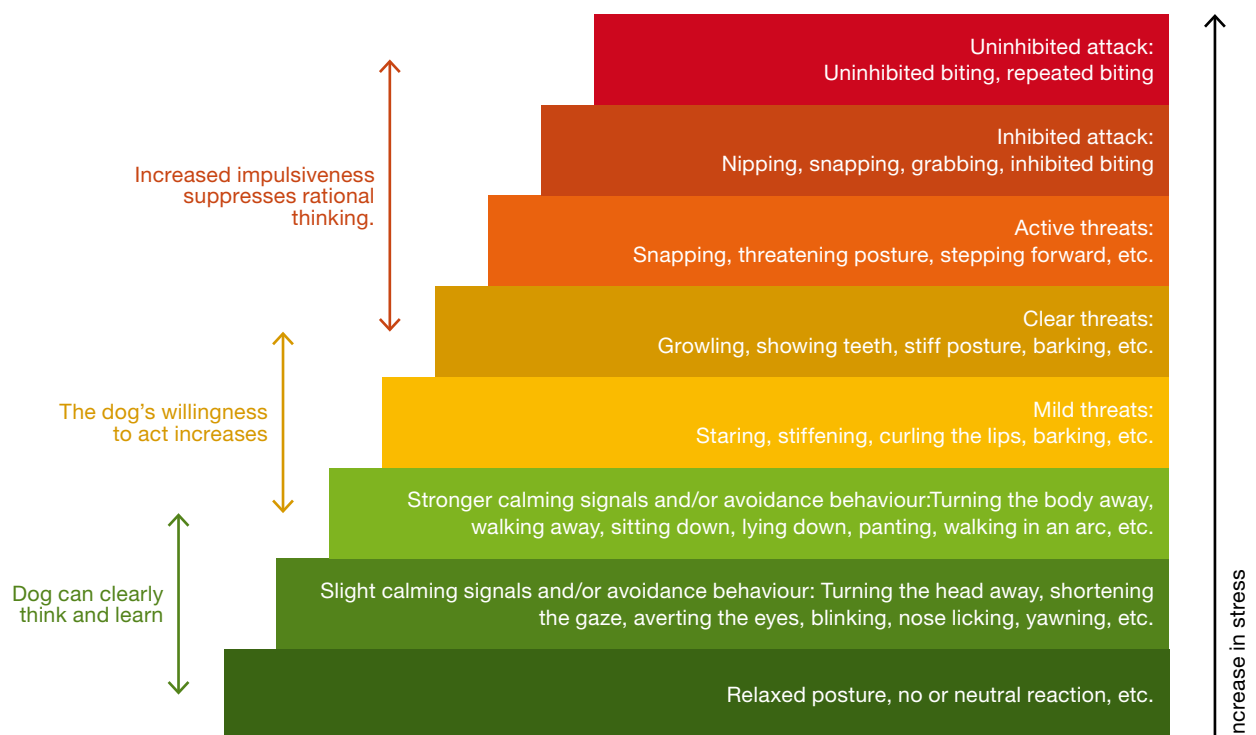
The ladder of aggression

Dogs express their emotions clearly and directly through their body language. The ladder of aggression illustrates how the expression of emotions can escalate from subtle communication signals to violent reactions.

In the green zone of the ladder of aggression, the dog is able to think clearly, make choices, learn desired behaviour and demonstrate it. Training situations – especially those involving behavioural problems ([see Chapter 01.7](#)) – should be kept within the green zone as a result.

When a dog feels uncomfortable and stressed, it will usually react initially with calming signals and de-escalating behaviour. If these subtle signals do not ease the situation and the dog becomes increasingly stressed, it will begin to communicate more clearly. The dog leaves the green zone and moves into the yellow to light red zone.

Further up, in the red zone, rational thinking is no longer possible. Emotions take over and the dog reacts impulsively based on emotion.^{66, 67}



How quickly a particular dog escalates in a stressful situation, i.e. moves from one stage to the next, depends on its genetic make-up, its personality, the current situation and, above all, its previous learning experiences, which date back to its puppyhood. Behaviours or “escalation levels” that have not benefited the dog in the past are very unlikely to be displayed again in the future.⁶⁸ This is particularly problematic when it comes to communication or threat signals from the yellow/orange zone (see below, threatening behaviour).

Ideally, the dog's counterpart will already respond to the de-escalating behaviours from the green zone, and the situation will calm down. There is therefore no reason for the dog to escalate further. This is the best case scenario for everyone involved.

However, there are situations in which the counterpart, e.g. a child, does not recognise the dog's de-escalating signals and therefore does not respond to them.⁶⁹ This increases the likelihood of aggression.

Example

Four-year-old Anna is hugging the family dog Kiro and stroking him lovingly.

Kiro is not comfortable with this. He tries to get out of Anna's way (light green level), but Anna runs after him and continues to stroke him.

Now Kiro expresses himself more clearly in order to free himself from this awkward situation. He stiffens and curls his lips (yellow level).

Anna can't understand this subtle threat either and continues to harass Kiro. Kiro therefore becomes even clearer and growls at Anna (orange level). Anna's father scolds Kiro because Kiro shouldn't growl at Anna. So even the growling doesn't make Kiro feel any better.

Anna pauses for a moment, but then immediately strokes him again. Now the probability that Kiro will react by snapping or biting (dark orange/red level) increases.

Preventing accidents between children and dogs

The example above clearly shows how important it is to only allow contact between children and dogs under supervision. It is no coincidence that most dog bites involving children occur at home with the family dog:⁷⁰ children may have the best intentions but still end up provoking the dog. This can happen even if the dog is used to being around children. The supervision of an adult who pays attention to the dog's body language and intervenes early if necessary can prevent unpleasant situations and biting accidents involving children.

Calming signals

Calming signals are de-escalating communication signals. These subtle social gestures serve to signal friendliness and to prevent or defuse conflicts without increasing the distance.⁷¹ The dog is under mild stress.

These are the most common calming signals:

- Blinking (squinting)
- Averting the gaze
- Turning the head away
- Licking the nose
- Lifting a paw
- Yawning
- Turning the body away (standing facing away from their counterpart)
- Sniffing
- Sitting or lying down
- Walking in an arc

Like all signals, the calming signals must be viewed in context. For example, a dog could also be licking its nose because it has just eaten something tasty.

Examples

- Kiro is a little unsure when he encounters other dogs he does not know. Now he is meeting Lucy for the first time. Kiro wants to be polite and avoid conflict. He approaches slowly, walking in a slight arc, his head and gaze turned away from Lucy. He keeps sniffing the ground the whole way, even if it doesn't actually smell that exciting.
- Luna meets a strange dog on her walk, who sends her threatening signals. Luna turns her head away and starts sniffing the ground to let him know that she has understood the threat and is not looking for conflict.
- A stranger wants to stroke Kiro and quickly reaches out for him. Kiro feels threatened. He licks his nose, turns his head away and yawns.

Examples of dogs showing calming signals



Stress and stress signals

Stress arises in situations that require adaptation to external or internal influences. Mild stress (see below) can feel stimulating. When dogs experience severe stress, they feel uncomfortable, threatened or overwhelmed.⁷² Examples include loud noises, prolonged and intense heat, unfamiliar situations, separation from humans, harsh training and conflict situations.⁷³ The body reacts to this with a stress response (e.g. increase in heart rate, body temperature and pulse, muscle tension, loss of appetite). Stress is therefore an involuntary reaction of the body that the dog cannot consciously control.^{74, 75}

Short-term, mild stress that dissipates quickly is harmless and unavoidable in life. Dogs experience mild stress in pleasant situations as a reward and stimulation, because their brains release dopamine. Even if the stress is very high for a brief moment, it can feel good. It is crucial that there is a sense of control and predictability and that the stress is not chronic. Prolonged, very high levels of stress can be hazardous to their health and lead to behavioural problems.⁷⁶

Stress can be recognised externally by stress signals.^{77, 78} Some of the signals can also indicate a medical problem.

These are the most common signs of stress:

- More frequent nose licking
- More frequent yawning
- Panting (other than to regulate body temperature as in the case of heat/exertion)
- Pulling the ears back
- Stressed facial expression (see below)
- Vocalisations such as whining, barking
- Increased body tension
- Scratching themselves
- Penis crowning
- Bristly areas of fur
- Biting the lead
- Jumping up
- Mounting
- Increased urination and defecation
- Destroying objects

If a dog yawns or scratches itself once, this does not necessarily mean it is highly stressed. Only when these signals are more frequent and/or more intense are they a clear sign of stress.

These are the most common signs of severe stress:

- Poor or no responsiveness
- Very strong panting
- Very tense body
- Cannot accept food
- Sweaty paws (dogs can only sweat through their paw pads)
- Trembling
- Flaky skin
- Sudden hair loss
- Excessive grooming
- Vomiting and diarrhoea

Examples

- Mrs Schweizer has an appointment and takes Kiro with her. She leaves the house a little late and has to hurry to catch the bus. Kiro is therefore excited and starts panting as they board the bus. The bus is crowded and noisy; a school class is on an excursion. Kiro yawns several times and begins to scratch himself. Three pupils come up and want to stroke Kiro. Mrs Schweizer allows this, as she doesn't realise that Kiro is already stressed. The three pupils stroke Kiro at the same time, inadvertently pushing him into a corner. Kiro's stress level continues to rise. He starts to jump up on Mrs Schweizer.
- Luna is at the vet. Ever since she had an unpleasant experience, she no longer likes going to the surgery. Mr Zürcher lifts her onto the table and holds her firmly. Luna has a stressed expression on her face. The vet begins his examination and her sweaty paw prints become visible on the black mat. After the examination she shakes and her fur is full of dandruff.

Examples of dogs displaying stress signals



The stressed facial expression

Stress in dogs can be read quite easily from their faces: they have a stressed facial expression, which can vary slightly from dog to dog in different situations. Stressed facial expressions are often misinterpreted, e.g. with statements such as “The dog is happy and smiling”.⁷⁹

These are some of the characteristics found in a stressed facial expression:

- The corners of the mouth are pulled far back, causing the typical stress lines at the corner of the mouth
- The tongue is hanging out of the mouth
- Eyes narrowed or wide open
- Enlarged pupils
- Smooth forehead

Examples of dogs with a stressed facial expression



Avoidance behaviour

A dog displays avoidance behaviour when it wants to avoid a situation or interaction (e.g. out of insecurity, fear or after an unpleasant previous experience).^{80, 81} Unlike calming signals, avoidance involves the dog moving away. If the dog cannot escape the situation (repeatedly) through avoidance behaviour, its behaviour is likely to escalate (see ladder of aggression above).

These are common signs of avoidance behaviour:⁸²

- Avoiding eye contact
- Turning head and ears away
- Tilting the body's centre of gravity away
- Retreating
- Tail carried low or between the legs
- Bending the joints (making themselves appear smaller)
- Possibly also blinking, pawing or licking the nose

Examples

- Luna's ears need to be cleaned daily. She has already had two such ear cleanings and they were very unpleasant for her. Now Mr Zürcher stands in front of her with the ear cleaner and wants to clean her ears again. She tries to avoid the situation by turning her head away and making herself small.
- Like most dogs, Kiro finds it uncomfortable when people lean over him. He feels threatened. Mrs Schweizer often leans over Kiro when he is on the lead. This makes him so uncomfortable that he moves to the side and averts his head and eyes as soon as Mrs Schweizer tries to put him on a lead.

Examples of dogs displaying avoidance behaviour



Threatening behaviour (aggressive behaviour)

If the dog's subtle, friendly communication signals are unsuccessful, e.g. if the threat gets closer or the dog's discomfort persists, it will warn its counterpart more clearly with threatening behaviour, e.g. by staring and/or growling.⁸³

When staring, the muscles are tense and the entire dog stiffens, the body's centre of gravity shifts forward, the mouth is usually closed and the eyes are fixed on the counterpart.⁸⁴

Growling is a clear acoustic warning that the counterpart will perceive even if they have overlooked or not understood the dog's previous signals.⁸⁵ Depending on the situation, growling can mean the following: "Let go of me immediately", "Don't come any closer", "Go away", "Stay away from my resource" (e.g. toy, food, sleeping place), "Don't touch me" etc.

The reasons for this behaviour can vary. Very often, insecurity, fear, discomfort or even pain are behind this. Anger, rage and frustration can also trigger aggressive behaviour.⁸⁶

A threatening dog intends to intimidate or scare away the threatening stimulus (human, dog, object, etc.) without causing injury.

A threatening dog is not a "bad" dog. On the contrary, it wants to resolve the situation without attack or injury. A dog may resort to an attack (inhibited or uninhibited biting) if its threatening behaviour does not achieve its desired goal of increasing the distance.⁸⁷

Threatening behaviour is normal for dogs, and it is important that they are allowed to communicate in this way when something is too much for them. Growling is an important part of their communication, especially when living with humans, and should therefore not be punished. If the dog is punished for growling, possibly even repeatedly, there is a high probability that it will no longer growl in similar situations in future and may even bite without warning one day.

If a dog growls, the situation should be resolved in a calm and relaxed manner and the cause investigated. For example, has the dog been harassed, led into a stressful situation or has it defended a resource? The fact is that the dog felt it necessary to threaten in this situation. If the cause is known, such situations can be handled differently in future with management and/or training techniques. Professional support is recommended.

Hunting behaviour is often confused with aggressive behaviour. When displaying aggressive behaviour, the dog first attempts to increase the distance between itself and its counterpart by using warning threatening behaviour. In hunting behaviour, the dog chases after its prey with the aim of closing the distance. The prey is not warned in advance because the dog wants to grab the prey while chasing.⁸⁸ Well-socialised dogs do not show hunting behaviour towards humans. A lack of socialisation can lead to misguided hunting behaviour, such as chasing children or cyclists, which can be very dangerous. The dog owner is responsible for keeping their dog's hunting behaviour under control through management and training techniques. A specialist can be a great help here. In the event of excessive hunting behaviour or even signs of misguided hunting behaviour, it is strongly recommended that you consult a specialist.

Imposing behaviour

When dogs communicate with one another, they sometimes display imposing behaviour. This is intended to demonstrate their own security and strength. Its purpose is to intimidate same-sex rivals and attract the opposite sex.⁸⁹ For example, one dog standing across the path of another (T-position). The gaze is averted, the head and tail are held high.⁹⁰

More about this topic

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01.6

Causes of behaviour

Learning objective

- **I understand that every behaviour exhibited by a dog depends on many different factors and that its reaction in a particular situation is the result of a complex interplay of various causes.**

Behind every dog's behaviour is a highly complex interplay of causes. It is influenced by these and other factors:⁹¹

- Hereditary factors (genes) and epigenetic factors (environmental influences that affect gene regulation and activity)
- Prenatal influences
- Learning experiences throughout life, especially during the socialisation period
- State of health
- Experiences in the seconds, hours, days before, i.e. experiences immediately preceding as well as those further back in time
- General conditions (temperature, spatial situation, background noise, etc.)
- The needs, emotions and motivations of dogs

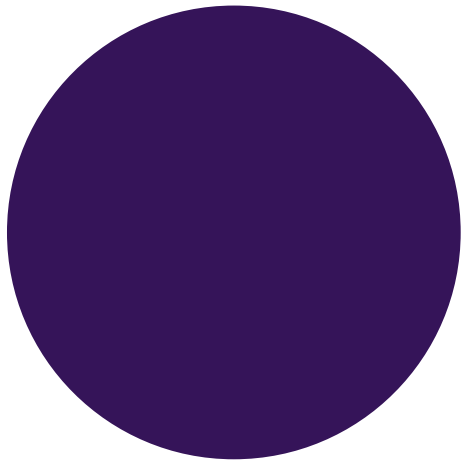
Examples

- A dog belongs to a breed that has been bred to react quickly to stimuli and make independent decisions. During its socialisation, it had unpleasant experiences with children and has wanted to avoid them ever since. On a walk, the dog is in pain because one of its paws is injured. The dog's owner is distracted and not watching the dog, which is running free, when a child suddenly appears and runs past the dog, screaming. The dog feels threatened and reacts much too strongly in that moment. It jumps at the child and knocks him over. This accident did not happen "out of the blue", but was the result of unfavourable circumstances.
- A dog of a breed specialising in water work is out and about near a river on a hot day. Its recall training is not yet very advanced. The dog runs happily to the water and jumps in, even though its owner is calling it back.

The dog has no choice: it cannot behave differently in this situation because the causes of its behaviour are beyond its control. Because of this, using pain or fear stimuli to suppress undesired behaviour is also unfair for ethical reasons. The dog owners are responsible for ensuring that the factors listed above (learning experiences from everyday life and training, health, needs, etc.) are such that the dog can behave as desired.⁹²

Causes of dog behaviour

What people think



■ He is stubborn, cheeky, dominant, does it on purpose

What is really behind the behaviour



■ Hereditary factor

■ Overwhelmed

■ Emotional state

■ Pain/illnesses

■ Environmental influences

■ Unmet needs

■ Previous experience

■ Inappropriate training

Self-rewarding behaviour

The term “self-rewarding behaviour” means that an action itself triggers a pleasant feeling: for instance, hunting is fun for dogs, even if they don’t catch their prey. Many behaviours are self-rewarding because they were necessary for survival, e.g. eating rubbish, chasing moving objects. In addition, certain behaviours have been encouraged through breeding over centuries or even millennia, depending on the purpose of the dog.⁹³

Examples

- A herding dog, such as a Border Collie, approaches other animals in the typical crouched manner
- A pointing dog, such as a Pointer, remains standing with its paw raised when it smells game
- A retriever, such as a Labrador, often picks up objects and carries them around

Both the stimulus reaction time and the degree of willingness to cooperate with humans differ between breeds.^{94, 95}

However, every dog of a particular breed is first and foremost an individual personality of its own – no two Dachshunds or German Shepherds are alike. Before bringing home a dog, you should think carefully about which type of dog suits your lifestyle and for what purposes the breed you have in mind was originally bred (see Chapter 04.2).

01.7

Behavioural problems

Learning objectives

- **I am able to recognise behavioural problems at an early stage and call in specialist help.**
- **I know that I can turn to specialists in the fields of behavioural medicine, behavioural counselling and dog training if my dog has behavioural problems.**
- **I know that I can consult specialists if I have questions about neutering.**

Living happily with a dog is a great way to enrich your life. However, in the course of a dog's life, minor or major problems may arise that disrupt this coexistence and/or cause the dog to suffer. The earlier such a problem is addressed, the better the chances of solving it. This also minimises the time involved and financial outlay, because the longer the dog can demonstrate the behaviour, the more it becomes ingrained. Helping an animal that is suffering emotionally and/or physically is required from an ethical point of view and in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act (Tierschutzgesetz).

Not every problem is a "behavioural problem". A distinction is made between undesired behaviour, behavioural problems and disturbed behaviour.⁹⁶

Undesired behaviour

There are behaviours that are part of normal dog behaviour but are annoying for humans. These are known as undesired behaviour.

Examples

- Digging in the garden
- Pulling on the lead
- Chasing after birds
- Chewing on furniture
- Rolling in dirt or faeces
- Begging at the table
- Jumping up on visitors
- Barking when excited

Every behaviour is based on a combination of several factors (see Chapter 01.6). Learning experiences play a major role here. Many of these undesired behaviours are either self-rewarding (e.g. hunting) and/or have often been unintentionally reinforced by the dog owner in the past (see Chapter 02).

Undesired behaviour can usually be remedied effectively and sustainably through appropriate, individual management and training measures. It is advisable to consult a competent dog training specialist.

Behavioural problems

Behaviours that represent a burden or even a danger for the dog itself, its owners and/or its environment are referred to as behavioural problems. Many behaviours can be normal to a certain extent and in certain settings. We only speak of behavioural problems when they occur inappropriately and/or excessively.

Examples

- Excessive anxiety
- Restlessness, nervousness
- Anxious behaviour when separated from humans or when alone (separation anxiety)
- Anxious behaviour in response to noises (noise phobia)
- Overreaction/aggressive behaviour towards various stimuli such as other dogs, people, moving stimuli (reactivity)
- Excessive defence of resources such as objects, food, sleeping places, etc.
- Nausea, stress and anxiety when travelling in the car
- Excessive hunting/herding behaviour
- Excessive territorial behaviour

The following factors are usually significant in the development of behavioural problems:

- Behaviours that are exhibited in the case of behavioural problems are often self-rewarding.
- Emotional/psychological stress, for example due to one or more negative learning experiences,⁹⁷ poor disposition, changes in family circumstances, etc.
- Physical stress, such as discomfort, pain, digestive problems, hormonal problems, etc.⁹⁸

In these cases, professional help in the form of behavioural therapy (see below) is required.

Disturbed behaviour

Disturbed behaviour refers to abnormal behaviour that does not correspond to the dog's normal behaviour. Put simply, this type of behaviour fulfils no biological purpose.

Behavioural disorders manifest themselves, for example, in stereotypical behaviour, i.e. repetitive, compulsive behaviour that has no discernible purpose. It is persistent and almost continuous, with the dog showing little or no responsiveness. Medical problems such as epilepsy or brain tumours can cause such behaviour and even lead to severe aggression.

Examples

- Constantly turning in circles
- Chasing shadows or light reflections
- Biting their own tail
- Catching imaginary flies
- Self-harming behaviour
- Exaggerated aggressive behaviour

In order to help the dog as quickly and effectively as possible, specialists in the fields of behavioural medicine, veterinary medicine or, if necessary, neurology should be consulted.

Behavioural therapy

In the event of behavioural problems, professional support from a competent specialist in the field of dog training (with appropriate additional training) or behavioural medicine is strongly recommended.

The first step for this expert is to get a comprehensive picture of the dog and its living conditions (everyday life, social environment, handling, care) as part of a comprehensive assessment (medical history). This usually includes a thorough veterinary examination and forms the basis for a personalised training plan with appropriate management techniques.

The training is organised under professional guidance and is structured in a way that is easy for dog owners to understand. The aim is to familiarise the dog and its human with the exercises so that they can practise independently in everyday life. Over time, the exercises can be adapted and new exercises added. Regular appointments are recommended for further support.

Depending on the initial situation and/or severity of the problem, it may be advisable to support the dog with medication. A behavioural veterinary practice is the appropriate point of contact in this case.

The following criteria will help you identify competent professionals (dog training, behaviour counselling, animal psychology, behavioural medicine).^{99, 100}

Competent professionals ...¹⁰¹

- ... treat people and dogs with respect.
- ... create a relaxed training atmosphere.
- ... have specialised training and undergo continuous further training.
- ... are familiar with health-related and behavioural causes of problem behaviour.
- ... work together with veterinary practices to provide medical assessments.
- ... build the training on a shared sense of achievement.
- ... work in a needs-oriented manner and with positive reinforcement.
- ... work below the stimulus threshold whenever possible and increase the difficulty slowly.
- ... give the dog choices/a sense of control.

Warning sign: The following actions are cause for concern: The professional ...¹⁰²

- ... deliberately pushes the dog into overwhelming situations, i.e. provokes the dog to show the behavioural problem.
- ... uses pain and shock stimuli to suppress the undesired behaviour/behavioural problem such as throwing objects at the dog, pushing the dog to the ground, physically harassing/blocking the dog, jerking the lead, spraying the dog with water, etc.
- ... makes the dog feel helpless/vulnerable (loss of control).¹⁰³

Neutering

Neutering is often recommended too hastily in connection with behavioural problems. The decision as to whether and when neutering is advisable depends on the individual dog and its living environment. The first step is to determine the advantages and disadvantages of neutering for the dog, both itself and for its environment. The next step is to weigh up whether neutering makes sense or not.¹⁰⁴

Behavioural problems that are not directly related to sex hormones are not resolved by neutering in the vast majority of cases.¹⁰⁵

A (behavioural) veterinary practice is the right place to go for advice on this matter. The timing of the neutering should also be discussed. It is important that the dog's individual situation is addressed neutrally in this consultation. A medical problem that can be resolved through neutering, such as undescended testicles or uterine inflammation, is a clear reason for performing the procedure.

In male dogs, in addition to surgical castration, there is the option of implanting a castration chip, which causes temporary chemical castration.¹⁰⁶ This can also be used to observe whether the dog's behaviour changes with a smaller amount of male sex hormones (testosterone). This experience makes it easier to decide whether to neuter the dog or implant a chip again.

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01.8

Outdated views

Learning objectives

I am aware that outdated views are circulating on the following topics:

- **Dominance theory: dogs do not have to be “subdued”.**
- **Dealing with fear: dogs need appropriate social support.**
- **Common misinterpretations of expressive behaviour: wagging, staring**
- **“Puppy protection” does not apply to unfamiliar dogs.**
- **“They’ll sort it out amongst themselves!”: is not desired without the mutual agreement of the dog owners involved.**

Thanks to countless research studies on dogs, our knowledge is now more comprehensive than ever before. Nevertheless, you will still hear outdated views at dog parks and on walks, even though they have been scientifically refuted.

Dominance theory

Dog owners often hear the following statements:

- “You have to go through the door before the dog so it understands that you’re the boss.”
- “The dog isn’t allowed on the sofa, otherwise it sees itself as the alpha dog.”
- “If it doesn’t listen to you, it’s doing it on purpose because it’s dominant.”
- “If it cuts you off, it wants to control you and be the alpha dog.”
- “If it cuts you off or pulls on the lead, it wants to control you and be the alpha dog.”

These statements can be ignored because they mainly justify punishment-based training.¹⁰⁷ These ideas originally stem from observations of captive wolves.¹⁰⁸ Conclusions from these observations were then transferred to dogs – wrongly, because on the one hand dogs are not wolves and on the other hand wolves behave differently in captivity than they do in the wild.^{109, 110}

There is no scientific data to prove that dogs want to dominate humans.^{111, 112}

Dog owners manage all the resources necessary for their dogs and make most of the decisions about them. They are in a position of power, which they should exercise responsibly.

If a dog displays problematic behaviour and, for example, defends a chew bone from its owner, this does not mean that it is dominant.¹¹³ The cause of the behaviour displayed can only be identified by taking a closer look (see Chapter 01.6, Chapter 01.7 and Chapter 02).

Most definitions and theories surrounding the concept of dominance are outdated.¹¹⁴ Dominance is not a personality trait, but refers to the relationship between dogs that live in a social group.^{115, 116}

Dealing with fear

Dog owners also often hear the following statements:

- “If the dog is scared, you have to ignore it.”
- “If you pet a scared dog, it gets more scared.”

Advice to ignore or even punish an anxious dog for anxious behaviour such as restlessness, nervousness, trembling, whining and poor responsiveness is outdated and can make the anxiety worse.¹¹⁷

Anxious dogs can be reassured through calm and loving support (see Chapter 02.3).¹¹⁸ It does not matter whether there is any actual danger. What matters is the dog's subjective perception.

Suitable measures include:

- Staying with the dog (outside on a lead if necessary)
- Allowing physical closeness
- Gentle holding
- Speaking calmly
- Offering a suitable distraction
- Supporting acceptable behaviour exhibited by the dog (e.g. retreating to the bathroom, snuggling up to the dog owner, hiding behind the sofa).

Interpreting body language

Dog body language is very complex. A dog's mood cannot be ascertained by looking at a single part of its body. This can lead to (sometimes dangerous) misinterpretations. Interpretation always requires an overall picture of the dog (display) and the current situation (see Chapter 01.4 and Chapter 01.5).

The following interpretation endures stubbornly:

- “When a dog wags its tail, it's happy”

Wagging the tail signals a heightened state of excitement, which can be positive or negative. So a dog may wag its tail when it is happy, but also when it is threatening and about to bite.¹¹⁹

The following interpretation of dog behaviour is often heard:

- “The other dog started it. It suddenly started barking aggressively at my dog. Mine didn't do anything, it just looked at the other dog.”

This cannot be ruled out. However, it is much more likely that the dog that was “just looking” was not just looking, but was fixing its gaze on the other dog. In a neutral or friendly looking dog, the body posture is relaxed, the gaze soft and the muzzle might be open. Staring, on the other hand, is part of threatening behaviour and means “Don't come any closer” or “Go away”. This is why a dog that is stared at by another dog may react in an unfriendly manner (see Chapter 01.4 and Chapter 01.5).¹²⁰

Puppies and strange dogs

The following assumption is also widespread:

- “A puppy enjoys puppy protection with other dogs; nothing can happen to it.”

Not every adult dog likes strange puppies. If you do not take this into account, you risk unpleasant learning experiences for your puppy. Dog owners should therefore carefully choose when their puppy comes into contact with other dogs. It has been observed in wolf packs that the entire wolf family treats its pups very leniently.¹²¹ However, this behaviour cannot be transferred to encounters between pups and other dogs.

Encounters between strange dogs

The following requests and statements are quite common when another dog and its human approach:

- “Let your dog off the lead. They'll sort it out among themselves!”
- “Mine is friendly. It just wants to say hello.”

The decision as to whether dogs may have direct contact must always be based on mutual agreement between the humans. The safety and well-being of all those involved have top priority (see Chapter 03.4). Humans should not assume that all dogs get along with each other.¹²² This can lead to unpleasant learning experiences or even conflicts resulting in injuries or worse.

Dog owners are generally obliged to walk and train their dogs in such a way that they do not run towards another dog on a lead. If the answer to the question of whether the dogs should make contact is “no”, this must be respected. Simply letting a dog run up to other dogs and then lecturing the other human by saying “They’ll sort it out between themselves” is not only irresponsible, it’s transgressive.

If a loose dog runs towards a dog on a lead and a conflict resulting in injury occurs, this is legally considered a breach of the duty of care and a lack of supervision.

As a result, the owner of this dog must expect to be liable for all damages.¹²³

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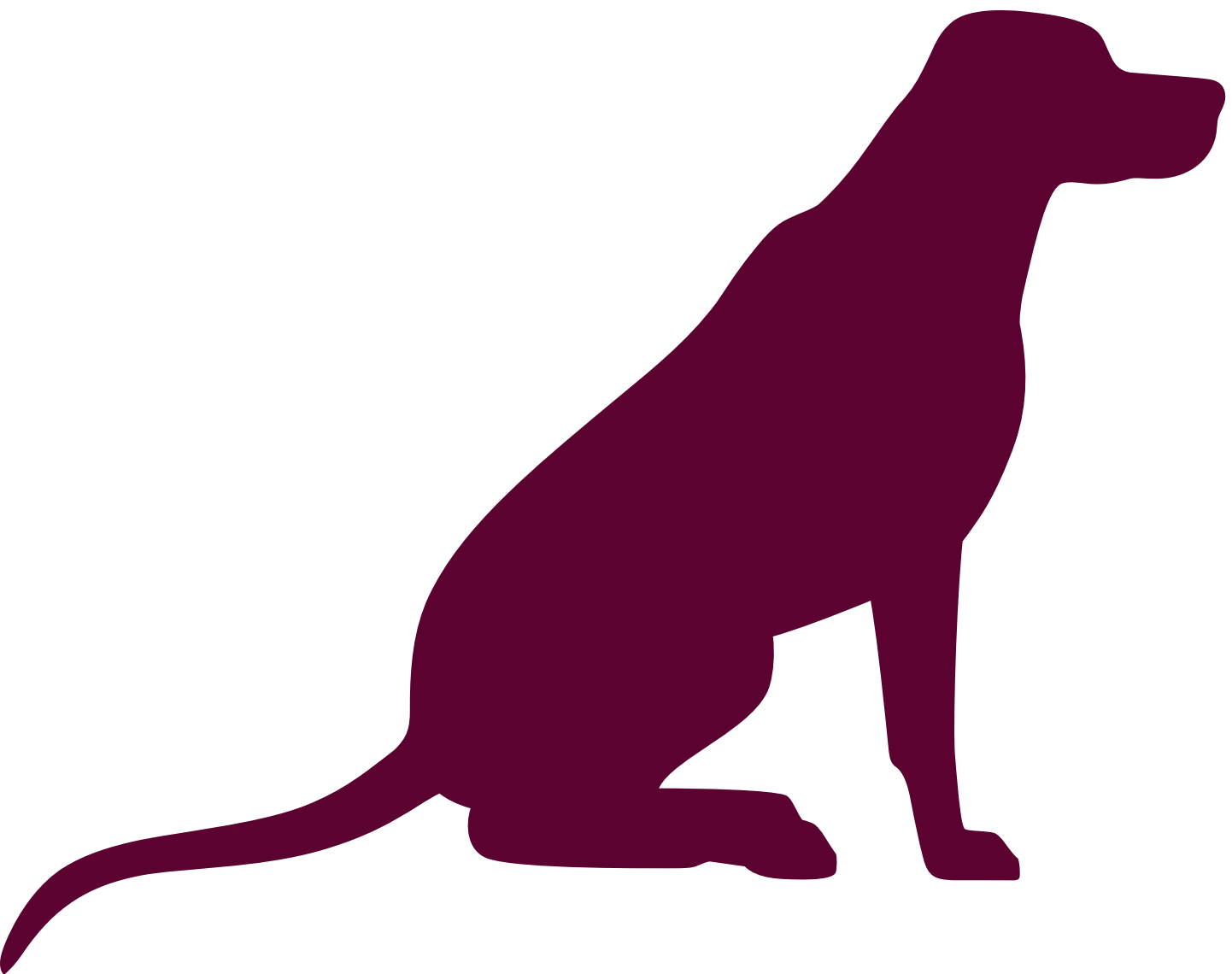
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Image source (page 7): “Die Farbwahrnehmung”: <https://www.fellby.de/Koennen-Hunde-Farben-sehen>

02

Learning behaviour



02.1

Introduction to learning theory

Learning objectives

- **I understand that learning is always going on.**
- **I know the important ways of learning.**
- **I know how to create an optimal learning environment.**
- **I know what points I need to consider for successful training.**

Learning theory describes the laws of learning, i.e. how learning works. Learning is a process in which experience causes a long-term change in behaviour.¹ This enables dogs to adapt to new environmental conditions and the current situation. The term “conditioning” is often used in this context. This means that humans and animals learn by associating certain environmental conditions with their behaviour and the resulting emotions.²

The various forms of learning and the laws according to which mammals, including dogs, learn have been well researched. The laws of learning are the same for all dogs. A dog can change its behaviour at any age based on its experiences.³

Dogs are always learning

For successful dog training, it is essential to understand that dogs are always learning. Dogs therefore not only learn during the training sessions themselves, but also before and after them. For puppies and young dogs in particular, this means that dog owners should always pay attention to what their dog is doing at any given moment and how it is feeling. Because that's what the dog is learning right now.

These are the most important forms of learning:

- Habituation
- Sensitisation
- Social learning
- Classical conditioning
- Operant conditioning

These forms of learning are not mutually exclusive, but work together. They are described in more detail in the following chapters.

Prerequisites for long-term learning success

Dog owners need to know how to teach their dogs desired behaviour: An important prerequisite for optimal learning is that the dog's basic needs ([see Chapter 01.2](#)) are met. The learning of a behaviour is linked to the dog's current mood. This gives the learning situation and the exercise an emotional meaning: e.g. pleasant/unpleasant, interesting/uninteresting, frightening/confidence-inspiring, exciting/calming. This emotional evaluation has an important influence on the dog's current and future behaviour.⁴ Pleasant emotions make dogs enjoy working with humans (motivation and willingness to cooperate).

For successful learning, dog owners should create a distraction-free and relaxed learning environment. Depending on the level of training, the amount of distraction is gradually increased.

Most people value certain behaviours in dogs such as walking on a loose lead or ignoring interesting smells. However, these are not part of the dog's natural behavioural repertoire. In order to successfully learn and maintain these behaviours, positive learning situations and individual training are required, as well as lots of repetition and clear, consistent and friendly communication from the dog owner.

Setting and achieving learning goals

Dog owners should weigh up for themselves what they want their dog to learn and what is important for a relaxed life together. A competent dog training school can help dogs and their humans plan and implement individual learning goals: trainers work together with the dog owners to develop a training plan with a coherent learning path that can be adapted individually throughout the training process.

Small steps lead to the (learning) goal

Many dog owners are unaware of how small the training steps need to be for successful training. With sufficiently small training steps, the dog understands as clearly as possible and without stress what behaviour is desired. As can be seen in the illustration, many small steps lead to the goal more quickly.⁵

The following aspects should be developed and improved step by step and independently of one another:

- Duration
- Distance
- Distraction
- Different situations (context changes)
- Level of difficulty⁶



Example

Kiro needs to learn to wait calmly in a certain place.

- Mrs Schweizer stands calmly next to Kiro and rewards him for waiting quietly.
- In the next step, she moves and walks around a little. Kiro continues to wait. She says her marker word (see Chapter 02.5) to let him know that he is doing well and rewards him with a piece of dry food.
- Now Mrs Schweizer becomes more active, for example, she puts on her shoes and jacket and unlocks the front door. Again, she rewards Kiro for waiting.
- Waiting is practised in different places and the duration of the waiting time is increased. The wait is rewarded every time.
- Distracting stimuli such as passers-by are now increasingly incorporated into the training programme. The wait is rewarded every time.
- As soon as Kiro performs the behaviour reliably, Mrs Schweizer gives a verbal cue (e.g. "Wait") before Kiro is supposed to wait. He is rewarded after each successful performance.
- The behaviour is then repeated often with the verbal cue and rewarded.
- To reinforce the behaviour in the long term, it is rewarded again and again.

02.2

Habituation and sensitisation

Learning objective

- **I understand the terms “habituation” and “sensitisation”.**

Habituation and sensitisation are simple forms of learning that occur without associations being made – they are based solely on repeated exposure to specific environmental stimuli.^{7,8}

Habituation

Habituation to a stimulus – such as an object, sound or smell – can occur when a dog repeatedly encounters that stimulus without it having any particular significance.⁹ As a result, the dog’s reaction to that stimulus gradually diminishes. If the dog finds the stimulus too intense or the stimulus makes the dog feel uncomfortable, it will not be able to become habituated to it.

Examples

- In a kennel, a series of different objects are placed in the puppy run. The puppies learn that these everyday objects belong to the world and no longer react to them after a certain time.
- A family moves into a new flat with their dog. The dog reacts to noises from the stairwell. It often goes to the front door and listens. However, nothing of significance happens to the dog. After a few days, it no longer reacts to the noises.

Sensitisation

The opposite of habituation is sensitisation. In this case, a stimulus – particularly if it is intense or significant to the dog – prompts an increasingly strong reaction. Over time, the dog therefore becomes more sensitive to this stimulus, for example by showing fear, excitement or increased alertness. Sensitisation happens particularly quickly when the stimulus is intense or potentially threatening, because every living being is keen to perceive dangers at an early stage in order to protect itself.¹⁰

Example

- After a sudden loud clap of thunder, Luna initially only startles slightly. In the days that followed, however, she began to react to even the faintest rumbling sounds with restlessness and panting. With every additional thunderstorm she experiences, her reaction becomes more intense – Luna has become more sensitive to loud noises.

02.3

Social learning

Learning objectives

- **I understand that dogs can learn by observing and imitating social partners.**
- **I can consciously apply this knowledge in my everyday life, especially when imitating behaviour and conveying moods (e.g. relaxation).**
- **I know that dogs can learn both desired and undesired behaviour through imitation.**

Social learning means that dogs can learn new things through the presence or behaviour of others. These include, for example, imitation, focusing their attention on specific objects or places, and mood transfer.⁸

Learning by imitation/learning from a model

Dogs can also learn by observing. Experts distinguish between true imitation and more general observational learning. We talk about imitation when a dog directly copies a specific behaviour exhibited by another dog or a human. For example: one dog sees another dog picking up a toy in its mouth and does exactly the same. However, it is difficult to prove conclusively that animals are capable of true imitation like this – it often appears as if it is happening, even though other learning processes are at play.

Observational learning is more common. Here, the dog does not merely observe a behaviour; it gathers information from the situation. This may draw its attention to an object (e.g. because another dog is sniffing a box) or it may realise that a certain behaviour is worthwhile (e.g. that pressing with his paw opens the box and releases food). In this case, the observing dog does not necessarily copy the exact behaviour, but uses the cues to succeed on its own.

Social learning does not, therefore, always mean “copying exactly”. More often than not, observing others increases the likelihood that a dog will perform a particular task or try out a certain behaviour – especially if it sees that it is worthwhile.⁸

Example of imitation

- Luna watches as Mr Zürcher takes a soft toy out of a box. Shortly afterwards, Luna takes another toy out of the box.

An example of observational learning

- Kiro watches as another dog scratches at a box several times until some food falls out. Kiro is now trying to open the box with his paws as well. He scratches, nudges or pushes it and now discovers that he can get to the food that way too

Mood transfer

Mood transfer describes the phenomenon whereby dogs pick up on the emotions of humans or other dogs – for example, through changes in their voice, scent or body language. Studies show that dogs resonate emotionally with their owners both in the short term (e.g. excitement or fear) and in the long term (e.g. stress hormone levels).^{11,12,13} This emotional contagion can strengthen cooperation and bonding, but also comes with the risk of stress and anxiety being passed on.¹³ In everyday life, this means: A calm, friendly atmosphere among people also supports the dog's well-being and ability to learn.

Examples

- After a hard day at work, Mr Schweizer comes home feeling annoyed and stressed. Although he doesn't say anything "negative" to Kiro, Kiro reacts in a noticeable way: he pants, paces nervously or seems more withdrawn.
- A dog is excited at dog school and the other dogs are infected by his excited mood.

02.4

Classical and operant conditioning

Learning objectives

- **I can differentiate between the learning forms of classical and operant conditioning on a theoretical level and know how they are used in training.**
- **I understand that classical conditioning always occurs during learning processes and cannot be consciously controlled by the dog.**
- **I understand that in classical conditioning, stimuli or sensory perceptions are linked to emotions, which lends them meaning for the dog.**
- **I understand that in operant conditioning, behaviour is reinforced or inhibited by four consequences – i.e. positive and negative reinforcement or positive and negative punishment.**
- **I know that timing is crucial for successful conditioning.**

This chapter looks at classical and operant conditioning. These two forms of learning work together, with fluid transitions between them.

Classical conditioning

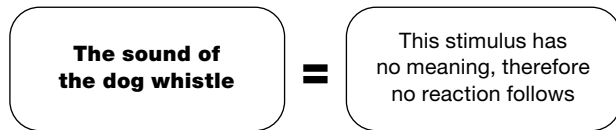
In classical conditioning, two stimuli that occur in quick succession are linked together.¹⁴

Classical conditioning works as follows:¹⁵

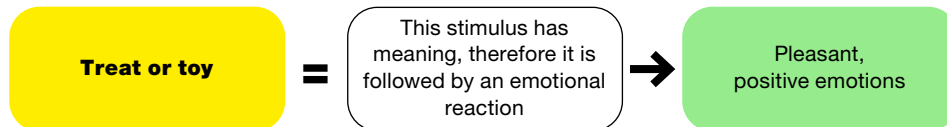
1. The first stimulus has no meaning for the dog yet; the dog shows no reaction to the stimulus.
2. The second stimulus inherently has meaning for the dog. This means that as soon as it perceives the stimulus, it shows an emotional or physiological reaction: e.g. food -> joy and salivation/loud noise -> fear and an increased heart rate.
3. If the dog perceives the second stimulus shortly (ideally within 0.5-1 second) after the first stimulus, these two stimuli are linked in his brain.¹⁶
4. After a few repetitions, the first stimulus – which was originally of no significance to the dog – triggers a reaction similar to that caused by the second stimulus, even if the second stimulus no longer follows.
5. However, in order for the association to remain intact, the second stimulus must not be completely omitted, but must occasionally reappear after the first stimulus.

In the following example, the sound of the dog whistle is associated with food or play and the pleasant emotions that come with them. The diagram illustrates classical conditioning:

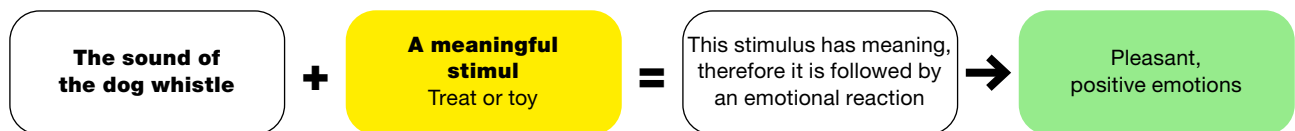
1. The sound of the dog whistle (first stimulus) is new to the dog and has no meaning yet:



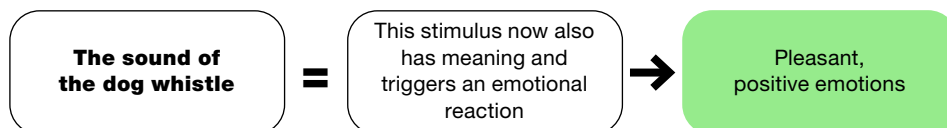
2. The dog finds a treat/toy (second stimulus) inherently great; this stimulus triggers positive emotions in it:



3. The dog hears the dog whistle and receives a treat/toy 0.5 to 1 second later. The second stimulus (food or toy) therefore quickly follows the first stimulus (sound of the whistle).



4. After a few repetitions, the dog already feels good when it hears the dog whistle without noticing the treat/toy: The sound of the whistle has become a meaningful stimulus for the dog and triggers the same pleasant emotions as the treat/toy.



To ensure that the association remains active, this needs to be repeated from time to time. Otherwise, the stimulus loses its (emotional) meaning for the dog.

Example of classical conditioning

- Luna learns that certain sounds, such as the sound of a tin being opened or the rustling of a food bag, may mean "food".

Fear-based conditioning – association with negative emotions

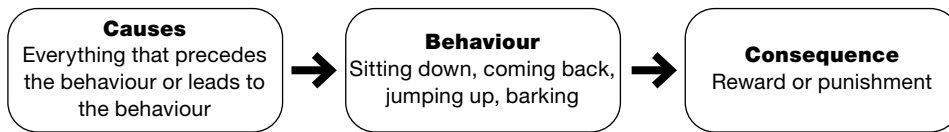
Stimuli can also be associated with negative emotions such as fear, anxiety or discomfort. However, it is not always obvious to humans which stimulus a dog has associated with negative emotions.^{17,18} Particularly in the case of intense experiences or those perceived as dangerous, even a single incident can be enough to create a strong and long-lasting association.⁸

Examples

- On a walk, Kiro notices a scooter. At the same time, he hears a loud bang. Kiro is startled and associates this unpleasant noise with the scooter.
- A stranger unexpectedly and roughly touches a young dog. The dog is frightened and feels unsettled. In future, simply seeing this person may trigger unpleasant feelings and lead, for example, to avoidance behaviour towards this person and others who look similar.
- Mrs Schweizer receives an upsetting text message and subsequently feels very uncomfortable every time her text message alert sounds. If she only receives pleasant messages over a longer period of time, the unpleasant feeling will probably gradually subside.

Operant conditioning

In operant conditioning, the dog learns that certain behaviour has certain consequences. In future, it will adjust its behaviour according to the consequences, doing certain things or refraining from doing them.



Causes

Each dog behaviour has many different causes (see Chapter 01.6), for example:¹⁹

- Needs such as food, rest, social contact or security
- Feelings such as pain, discomfort, insecurity, fear
- External stimuli such as birds in the meadow, a passer-by at the garden fence or a loud bang
- Learning experiences from everyday life and training, which may also date back further (e.g. from puppyhood)

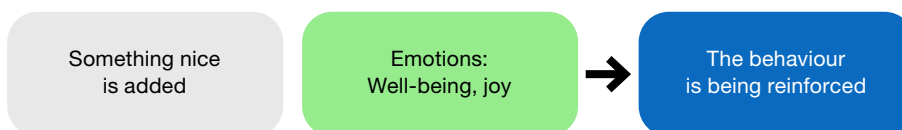
Consequences

In operant conditioning, the dog's behaviour is reinforced by rewards or inhibited by punishment. The reward or punishment that follows a behaviour is called a consequence.²⁰

- Behavioural reinforcement: If the dog is rewarded for its behaviour, it will display that behaviour more often.
- Behavioural inhibition: If the dog is punished for its behaviour, it will repeat it less often.

Rewards and punishments can each be designed in two ways, each triggering different emotions. The following examples from everyday life illustrate the four different consequences of operant conditioning and the emotions associated with them. "Positive" and "negative" stand for "add" and "take away".²¹

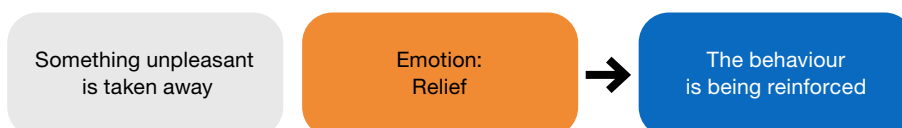
Positive reinforcement



Examples

- Kiro looks at Mrs Schweizer and immediately receives a valuable reward from her. After several repetitions, he is likely to look at her more often because he expects a reward.
- Luna loves liver sausage. She returns to Mr Zürcher when he calls her back and is immediately allowed to lick the liver sausage tube. She will probably come running back eagerly anticipating more liver sausage next time he calls her back.
- When Mrs Schweizer comes home, Kiro is delighted. He likes to jump up on her out of sheer excitement, which is not desired. Mrs Schweizer therefore quickly crouches down and puts some food on the floor for Kiro as soon as she comes in the door and while Kiro is still standing with all four paws on the floor. She positively reinforces the joyful greeting with all four paws on the floor, thereby increasing the likelihood that Kiro will not jump up at her next time because he is expecting food on the floor.

Negative reward/reinforcement

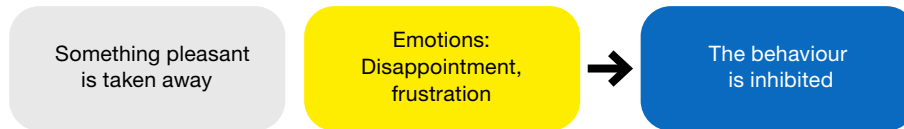


Examples

- Loud children's voices unsettle Luna, causing her to bark. While out walking with Mr Zürcher, she encounters children playing loudly. She manages to perceive this stimulus calmly, and Mr Zürcher immediately moves away from the source of the noise with her. Luna feels relieved as it becomes quieter around her. Her calm behaviour has been reinforced.

- Whenever the postman comes to the garden gate, Kiro barks loudly and persistently. As soon as the postman leaves, Kiro stops barking – and feels relieved because the “unpleasant” stimulus (the postman’s presence) has disappeared. To Kiro, the postman leaving acts as negative reinforcement for his barking: by barking, he manages to end the unpleasant stimulus (scaring the postman away), which is why he is highly likely to repeat this behaviour next time. Kiro isn’t capable of knowing that the postman would have left anyway.

Negative punishment



Examples

- As soon as Mr Zürcher puts on his jacket, Luna jumps up at him excitedly, expecting that they’re about to go outside. Mr Zürcher responds by taking his jacket off again and sitting down. This means that Luna no longer gets the positive reward – going out together – and her behaviour no longer leads to the desired outcome.
- Kiro pulls on the lead when out for a walk so he can get to an interesting smell more quickly. As soon as the lead tightens, his human stops immediately and waits until Kiro lets the lead slacken again. The moment Kiro pulls, he is denied access to what he wants (a spot he wants to sniff, moving forward).
- Mrs Zürcher takes a toy out of her bag to play a game of tug-of-war with Kiro. Kiro jumps up at her and tries to bite the toy. She puts the toy back in her bag. Kiro is disappointed and frustrated that the game has been interrupted. In future, he is more likely to wait and see before moving to get the toy.

Positive punishment



Examples

- So far, Kiro has been able to pass grazing sheep without any problems. On a walk, he observes the sheep, gets too close to the electric fence and receives an electric shock. He yelps in shock and pain. The next day, he refuses to walk past the sheep and displays fearful behaviour.
- Luna annoys Mr Zürcher because she takes a little too long to stop sniffing when he calls her back. He grabs her roughly by the harness and leads her on, scolding loudly. Luna is frightened and feels uncomfortable. The next time she is called back, she probably hesitates, fearing an unpleasant reaction from Mr Zürcher.

Operant conditioning in dog training

It is generally advisable to encourage desired behaviour wherever possible and to reinforce it often enough that it becomes increasingly reliable.²²

Positive reinforcement is best suited for this purpose because:

- The dog associates the desired behaviour with pleasant/desirable consequences and positive emotions.
- This motivates the dog to display this behaviour more often and to prefer it over other behaviours.

The following chapters on learning explain the use of rewards and punishments in dog training, as well as their advantages and disadvantages.

02.5

Reinforcement – all about reward

Learning objectives

- **I know how to create situations so that my dog can display desired behaviour.**
- **I know how to reinforce desired behaviour with appropriate rewards.**
- **I understand that a reward only reinforces a behaviour if the dog perceives it as a reward.**
- **I am familiar with various reward options.**
- **I recognise desired behaviour that the dog displays spontaneously and can reinforce it.**
- **I know the difference between rewarding and luring.**
- **I know that desired behaviour is demonstrated before any undesired behaviour.**
- **I know that I can use proactive management techniques to help my dog avoid displaying undesired behaviour as much as possible and therefore to avoid practising it.**
- **I know how marker training works.**

As dogs are always learning, there are countless opportunities every day to reward desired behaviour. The dog will exhibit the rewarded behaviour more often because it makes the dog feel good and it is rewarding.

Example

Kiro often sits down spontaneously on the bus. Mrs Schweizer then rewards him with words of praise and treats. Kiro will probably sit down more and more often on future bus journeys.

Dog owners should make it their task to create situations in which the dog can at least begin to show desired behaviour.

Putting together the information learnt in the previous chapters results in the following general framework for successful training:

- Good general well-being and basic needs fulfilled
- Distraction-free and relaxed learning environment
- Training characterised by goodwill and positive emotions
- Suitable training material and rewards that are appropriate for the dog

The following aspects are important for successful rewarding and are discussed in the following sections:

- Type of reward (e.g. food, play, social recognition)
- Place the reward is kept (e.g. tin, jacket pocket)
- Timing (marker or direct reward)
- Location of the reward (e.g. directly with the human or on the dog's blanket)
- How the reward is given (e.g. stalking, catching, chasing)
- Quality and quantity of the reward

Type of reward

Learning success depends to a large extent on the type of reward. It is therefore advisable to consider in advance which rewards are best suited to the dog in each situation. Certain rewards are given directly to the dog by the human, such as food, play or praise. Others involve the dog's environment, for example running, sniffing or contact with other dogs.²³ The choice of reward depends on the situation and should correspond to the dog's motivation, current needs and level of excitement. Every dog has its own preferences. The best reward for a dog is what it wants or wants to do most at that moment.

Food reward

Food is very high on the reward list for many dogs.^{24, 25} Food rewards are easy to handle, can be taken anywhere and fulfil a basic need. The appeal of food rewards can vary: one dog might like cheese, another may prefer sausage and a third apple pieces. The possibilities for food rewards are almost limitless. The choice of food reward can and should be tailored to the dog's preferences, size, energy requirements and health.

The dog's preferences may change depending on the situation:

- in a familiar, calm environment, dry food is usually sufficient to reinforce the dog's behaviour. In an exciting environment, such as a dog training school, many dogs need dog treats with a stronger smell as a reward.
- At higher temperatures, moist treats are better than dry ones.

Playing together as a reward

Many dogs enjoy playing together with their humans.²⁶ A toy in itself is not necessarily rewarding for a dog. Joy and fun often only come from playing together. This also includes friendly training in relinquishing things, so that the dog returns the toy without conflict when the game is over. Here too, every dog has its own preferences for certain toys and/or materials: fabric or fur strips, rubber balls with string, etc.

Social recognition

Social recognition in the form of words of praise or stroking can also be used.²⁷

Touching and stroking should be adapted to the situation and the dog's preferences:²⁸ many dogs do not like to be touched or stroked when they are very excited. Words of praise, on the other hand, are never out of place if the dog displays desired behaviour. Supportive words of praise can often encourage a dog to perform a behaviour for longer: if, for example, the dog finds it difficult to walk past another dog on a loose lead, a supportive "yes, that's right, well done..." can help it to continue walking on a loose lead. Whether a dog feels sufficiently rewarded with praise alone and repeats the desired behaviour varies from dog to dog and depends on the behaviour and the situation.

Other important factors for successful rewarding

Where the rewards are kept

Dogs quickly learn where food is kept, for example in a tin at home or in a jacket pocket when out and about. Dog owners can use this to their advantage during training to influence their dog's behaviour.

Example

Mr Zürcher wants Luna to walk to the left of him. That's why he prefers to give her the reward with his left hand from his left jacket pocket. Every dog wants to get its reward as quickly as possible. If Mr Zürcher were to take Luna's reward out of his right jacket pocket, Luna would almost certainly try to get close to this jacket pocket quickly and run in front of Mr Zürcher's feet.

The timing of rewards

In many situations, it is not easy to reward the dog at exactly the right time. The dog should receive the reward at the exact moment when it displays the desired behaviour. This makes it very likely that the dog will associate the reward with the desired behaviour.²⁹ If the reward is delayed even slightly, the dog may already be showing another, possibly undesired behaviour and would associate the reward with this other behaviour. Markers (see below) are a great help so that you are not too late with the reward.

Example

While out walking with Luna, Mr Zürcher wants to reward her for spontaneously turning towards him. He decides to give her a treat every time she makes eye contact or comes closer to him. The next time she makes eye contact, however, he has to dig the treat out of his jacket pocket. This takes a while, and Luna has long since looked away from him to a cat running away. Luna pulls on the lead in the direction of the cat. At that very moment, Mr Zürcher finally finds the treat and gives it to her. Unfortunately, Mr Zürcher's bad timing rewards Luna's focus on the cat.

Reward location

The place where the dog receives its reward also has an effect on its future behaviour: the dog heads towards where it expects its reward to be.³⁰ Dog owners should therefore give their dogs their reward where the desired behaviour (e.g. staying seated or lying on a blanket) is additionally encouraged.³¹

Examples

- When the dog is rewarded for sitting, the treat is placed directly in front of its snout so that it can remain seated to eat it.
- When rewarding the dog for staying on the blanket, the treat should ideally be placed on the blanket itself to reinforce the desired behaviour in a specific place.

How the reward is given

Food rewards become even more appealing to dogs when they are allowed to stalk, catch, search for them in the leaves or chase after them. Toys are also more attractive if they move away from the dog in a similar way to prey.

Quality and quantity of the reward

The quality and quantity (number) of the reward should correspond to the difficulty of the task.³²

Some possible variations:

- Sausage instead of dry food
- Lots of small pieces of food instead of one large treat
- Quickly dispensing several pieces of food

Training desired behaviour

Desired behaviour can be elicited in many ways and then reinforced by a suitable reward.³³

- Capturing behaviour
- Luring behaviour
- Shaping behaviour
- Not allowing undesired behaviour to arise or changing it
- Extinction of behaviour

Discussing other approaches such as free shaping or target training would go beyond the scope of this booklet.³⁴

Capturing behaviour

Dogs spontaneously display many desired behaviours in everyday life. Dog owners should recognise and reward these. This is easier said than done, as people often tend to only pay attention to a dog when it shows undesired behaviour. However, it is much more advisable to recognise and reinforce desired behaviour.

Examples of spontaneously occurring, desired behaviour – Luna waits patiently while Mr Zürcher puts on his shoes.

- Kiro observes his surroundings and remains calm and relaxed.
- Kiro independently turns towards Mrs Schweizer.
- Luna walks calmly on a loose lead next to Mr Zürcher.

Luring behaviour

The luring technique can help a dog easily understand what new behaviour it is expected to display. To begin with, he is guided into the correct position or movement using a piece of food and receives a reward as soon as it exhibits the correct behaviour. Once the dog understands the process, it is lured with an empty hand. It receives the reward as soon as it has demonstrated the desired behaviour. The luring movement of the empty hand can later become the visual cue for the acquired behaviour.³⁵

Examples

- Mrs Schweizer lures Kiro into lying down.
- Mr Zürcher lures Luna onto a platform.
- Mrs Schweizer entices Kiro to walk close to her.

Shaping behaviour

If a dog starts displaying the first hints of the desired behaviour, dog owners can build on it in small, reasonable training steps so that the dog eventually displays it better, for longer or more consistently. The marker (see below) is also a suitable aid here.

Example

Mrs Schweizer wants Kiro to learn to fetch. Kiro has so far shown no interest in putting objects in his mouth.

As a first step, Mrs Schweizer rewards Kiro for showing an interest in a food pouch. For example, she rewards Kiro for looking at the food pouch or approaching it. Then she fills the pouch with food and places it near Kiro. Kiro goes over and opens his mouth to grab the pouch because it contains food. Mrs Schweizer goes over, opens the pouch and gives Kiro food. In the next step, she places the pouch partially under the sofa so that Kiro can pull it out with his mouth before rewarding him with food from the pouch. Once he is good at this, Mrs Schweizer stands slightly further away from the sofa so that Kiro is motivated to carry the pouch towards her. The distance is gradually increased. In the next steps, she practises the same thing with different objects and in different places.

Not allowing undesired behaviour to arise or changing it

Dog owners should be aware of situations that are difficult for their dogs and can trigger undesired behaviour such as barking or pulling on the lead. Proactive management techniques can help the dog to prevent undesired behaviour from arising in the first place (see Chapter 03.1). For example, the dog can be led past a challenging situation from a greater distance, or desired behaviours can be reinforced at an early stage – such as observing calmly or making eye contact with its human.³⁶

Examples of desired behaviour before undesirable behaviour occurs

- The dog remains standing on all four paws before it jumps up at the human.
- The dog calmly watches the birds before starting to run after them.
- The dog calmly observes noisy children from a distance before it starts barking.

It is also advisable to work with the dog to develop a desired alternative behaviour that it can display instead of the undesired behaviour: For example, the dog can learn to fetch a toy or lie down on its blanket when the doorbell rings, instead of jumping up at visitors. If the trained alternative behaviour is rewarding for the dog, the likelihood that it will display this behaviour increases (see Chapter 01.7).³⁷

Extinction of behaviour

If a behaviour is not followed by a reward, the dog will stop this behaviour sooner or later because it is no longer worthwhile for it. The behaviour is displayed again when it pays off for the dog in some way.³⁸

Example

Mrs Schweizer regularly looks after her godchild Sarah. Sarah is just learning to eat on her own. Food falls to the floor from time to time. Kiro realises that food is available here, sits down close to Sarah and waits for these morsels. He soon begins to actively beg: he puts his head on Sarah's leg, nudges her with his nose or his front paw, etc.

Sarah is getting older and more skilful with her knife and fork. She realises that she shouldn't feed Kiro. Kiro is frustrated because the tasty snacks don't materialise. His begging becomes more and more intense – without success. The begging is deliberately ignored. At some point, Kiro stops begging. One day, Sarah, who is now 10 years old, comes to Mrs Schweizer's house. She is tired and gobbles down her food carelessly, some of it falling onto the floor. Kiro is immediately at her side, begging like when Sarah was a toddler.

It is important to note that suddenly withdrawing a highly attractive “reward” (reinforcer) – in this case, food from the table – can cause the dog to become extremely frustrated. It is therefore advisable, when working to eliminate undesired behaviours, to simultaneously establish an alternative behaviour that is appealing to the dog and, ideally, cannot be performed at the same time as the undesired behaviour. For example, the dog can learn that it's worthwhile lying on its blanket or in its dog bed while people are eating, because that's where it will be given a tasty chew bone or other high-quality food.

Marker training

A marker is a cue that tells the dog: *“That's right – you'll get a treat now.”* It helps the dog to recognise the exact moment when the desired behaviour occurs, and to associate the behaviour with the subsequent positive consequence.

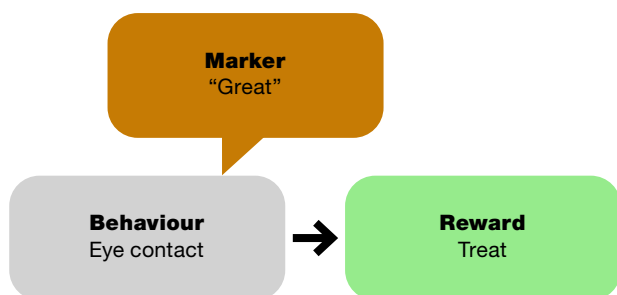
The term “marker” refers to the fact that dog owners can use a word or noise to “mark” desired behaviour with pinpoint accuracy. This means that the marker is given at the exact moment the dog displays the behaviour. Markers are either short, memorable words, e.g. “Yup”, “Great”, “Yes”, or sounds (e.g. with a clicker). They tell the dog which behaviour is desired and give the owner some time to get the reward and give it to the dog. Another advantage of the marker is that a dog owner can reward their dog with pinpoint accuracy even when it is some distance away.

To ensure that the marker becomes meaningful, it is first repeatedly associated with something the dog finds pleasant (classical conditioning) – such as food, play or attention. This creates a positive association, and the dog is already looking forward to the reward when it hears the marker ([see Chapter 02.4](#))^{39,40}

Example

Mrs Schweizer would like Kiro to spontaneously turn towards her more often when they go for walks. She resolves to reinforce every instance of spontaneous eye contact from Kiro by rewarding him.

On their next walk, Kiro looks at Mrs Schweizer and she immediately utters her marker “Great”. In this way, she informs Kiro that this exact behaviour is desired and the eye contact deserves a reward. She then throws him a piece of food. Thanks to this immediate positive response, Kiro learns that it's worthwhile looking at Mrs Schweizer – and will make eye contact more often in future.



02.6

Inhibition – all about punishment

Learning objectives

- **I can explain why inhibiting an undesired behaviour does not give dogs any information about the desired behaviour.**
- **I am aware that punishments can lead to insecurity, anxiety and stress.**
- **I know that frustration, stress, pain and fear can go hand in hand with aggressive behaviour.**
- **I know why physical reprimands should never be used.**
- **I understand that punishments carry the risk of creating unfavourable associations.**
- **I am aware that punishments can damage the bond and trust with the person administering the punishment.**
- **I understand that ignoring undesired behaviour only leads to success if the behaviour in question is not reinforced by other factors. I am aware of relevant examples.**

Dogs actively regulate their own well-being: they behave in ways designed to achieve pleasant states or reduce unpleasant ones. Some of these behaviours – such as barking, pulling on the lead or jumping up – can be disruptive for the dog's owner and/or the general public. For the dog, however, they serve a clear purpose: they make people pay attention to the dog, give it access to resources, or put an end to an unpleasant situation.^{41,42}

Examples

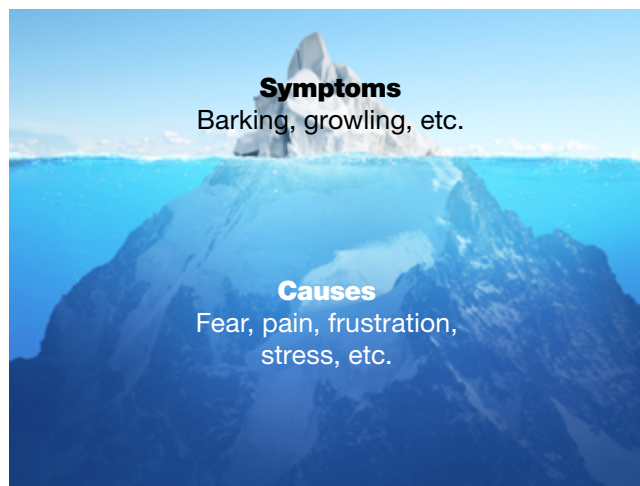
- Luna barks at guests at home because she feels insecure and wants to keep her distance.
- Luna growls during grooming out of discomfort or pain because she wants the grooming to stop.
- Kiro pulls on the lead because he is socially interested in another dog and wants to make contact.
- Luna scratches at the door and howls when she is alone because she is suffering from separation anxiety and wants to be with Mr Zürcher.

Ignoring undesired behaviour

If a dog behaves undesirably and is ignored, this is not always effective. If the behaviour is self-rewarding for the dog, ignoring it will not stop the dog from continuing to do it. Examples include eating rubbish on a walk or barking at the garden fence. If the dog behaves in an undesired way in order to get attention from "its" human, consistent ignoring can be useful. In any case, it is advisable to train an alternative behaviour (see Chapter 02.5). The dog then has a better opportunity to deal with a situation and display desired behaviour.⁴³

Inhibiting undesired behaviour

People immediately notice when their dog displays behaviour that they don't like, disrupts their everyday life or attracts negative attention.⁴⁴ This undesired or disruptive behaviour should therefore be stopped as soon as possible. If humans respond to this with punishment (frightening or painful stimuli such as shouting at the dog, jerking the lead, intimidation, throwing things at the dog), the behaviour may stop in the short term because punishment suppresses the behaviour. However, the underlying causes of the disruptive behaviour – such as unmet basic needs, frustration, stress, anxiety or pain – remain and may even get worse.⁴⁵



There is also a high probability that unfavourable associations will be created when punishment is used:⁴⁶

- the dog associates the unpleasant action with people (e.g. joggers, children), objects or the environment that it perceives at that moment (see Chapter 02.4).
- The dog may associate the unpleasant feeling with the person who is inflicting the unpleasantness on it. This can damage the relationship and trust in the long term.

Punishments do not show the dog what behaviour is actually desired. At best, it learns what behaviour it should not display, as this has unpleasant consequences for it.

Physical reprimands such as throwing the dog on its back or shaking it by the scruff of the neck are forbidden. Punishment-based training correlates with an increased likelihood of behavioural problems, anxiety and aggressive behaviour.^{47, 48} In addition, the Animal Protection Ordinance (APO – German: Tierschutzverordnung (TSchV)) prohibits excessive harshness when handling dogs.⁴⁹

Example

- The dog sitter shouts at Kiro every time he barks excitedly at the postman. Over time, Kiro no longer barks when the postman arrives, but shows more and more fearful behaviour as he expects to be punished.

Behaviour can be suppressed or inhibited in the short term through punishment, but only under very strict conditions – and even then, this is associated with notable side effects and animal welfare risks:

- For punishment to be effective, the punitive stimulus must be applied every time the dog displays the undesirable behaviour; irregular application is largely ineffective.⁵⁰
- The punishment must be severe enough to stop the behaviour immediately.
- The punishment must follow the specific behaviour almost immediately; any delay significantly reduces its effectiveness.⁴⁵
- The punishment should be associated exclusively with the undesired behaviour to prevent any incorrect associations (with other stimuli such as a person, place or object).
- The framework specified by the Animal Welfare Act (Tierschutzgesetz) must be observed (see Chapter 06).

The theoretical conditions under which punishment can suppress behaviour in the short term are, in practice, almost impossible to implement reliably. Furthermore, the risks are well documented: punishment can cause fear, stress and frustration, undermine the bond of trust between the dog and its human, and make the animal feel helpless or as though it has lost control.⁵¹ Studies show that punishment-based training leads to increased stress and a decline in well-being.⁴⁹

Learning theory offers friendly and successful alternatives to punishment-based training in which pain and shock stimuli, intimidation and withdrawal of control are avoided.⁵² This applies to all areas of training, including basic training, dog sports and training for undesired behaviour and behavioural problems (see Chapter 01.7).

Despite all precautions, (emergency) situations sometimes arise in everyday life in which the dog puts itself and/or third parties in danger. These can cause the owner to react impulsively and interrupt the dog's behaviour in an abrupt manner. However, this has nothing to do with planned and targeted training. The aim is to improve the dog's ability to handle similar situations in future through appropriate training and management techniques.

Example

Luna unexpectedly runs out onto the road because a cat suddenly darts out from under a parked car. Mr Zürcher has no choice but to pull hard on the lead, which inevitably results in an unpleasant or even painful jerk for Luna.

If undesired behaviour persists despite friendly, reward-based training, or even gets worse, a systematic analysis of the causes is required – ideally carried out in collaboration between dog owners, vets and behaviourists. Together, they should examine which circumstances might continue to trigger, sustain or inadvertently reinforce the behaviour.

- Physical causes: Undiagnosed acute or chronic pain, health issues or sensory impairments can influence behaviour.
- Self-rewarding behaviour: Some behaviours satisfy a need or trigger pleasant emotions (see Chapter 01.6).
- Inadequate management (see Chapter 03.1) and/or unrecognised training errors. For example, failing to adapt the environment and/or setting the bar too high can inadvertently encourage undesired behaviour.

02.7

Generalisation

Learning objectives

- **I know that dogs associate newly learned behaviour with the context of the learning situation.**
- **I know what the term generalisation means.**
- **I know that for reliable implementation in everyday life, the respective behaviour must be practised and reinforced in many different situations.**

The way in which dogs learn is context-dependent: This means that the learned behaviour is closely associated with the environmental conditions under which it was trained. Stimuli such as the location, smell, time of day, people present or the dog's own state of arousal can act as part of the learning context and influence whether the behaviour is exhibited. Behaviour is considered to be well generalised if the dog can reliably perform what it has been trained to do even under different conditions – i.e. in different places, with different people, in different moods or with different distractions.⁵³

Example

Mr Zürcher has been busy practising the “sit” cue with Luna at home in the living room. It works perfectly. He is very proud to show off what Luna has learned the next day on a walk in the woods with his neighbour. Just like at home, he gives Luna the cue, but she looks at him in surprise and doesn't sit down. What happened? Luna has linked the “sit” cue with the situation at home: in the living room in front of the TV, on the fluffy carpet. In order to successfully generalise the “sit” cue, Mr Zürcher must practise it in various situations and gradually increase the difficulty, such as the degree of distraction or the duration of the behaviour.

If a behaviour has not been sufficiently generalised, the dog is unlikely to be able to display it in different environments.⁵⁴ Especially in an environment characterised by constant change, it is essential that important everyday cues are well generalised and that the dog can respond to them everywhere, even when it is more distracted or excited.

Some ways generalisation can be achieved

The first training steps for a new behaviour are established in a low-distraction environment such as the home. Here, behaviour can already be generalised through training in different rooms, with varying distances between dog and human, and at different levels of excitement.

If learning progress is evident at home, other training environments can gradually be introduced. Distractions should be increased slowly and adapted to the dog. Training should by no means take place only in a protected environment such as your own garden or a training ground, but should also be incorporated into everyday situations (see Chapter 02.1). This helps the dog to exhibit the behaviour it has learnt with confidence, even in changing environmental conditions.

Example

After successful generalisation, Kiro responds to the “wait” cue when Mrs Schweizer is looking for the car keys in her bag in the dark at night. He can also wait while she exchanges a few words with the neighbour or when a child runs past him.

More on the topic of learning behaviour

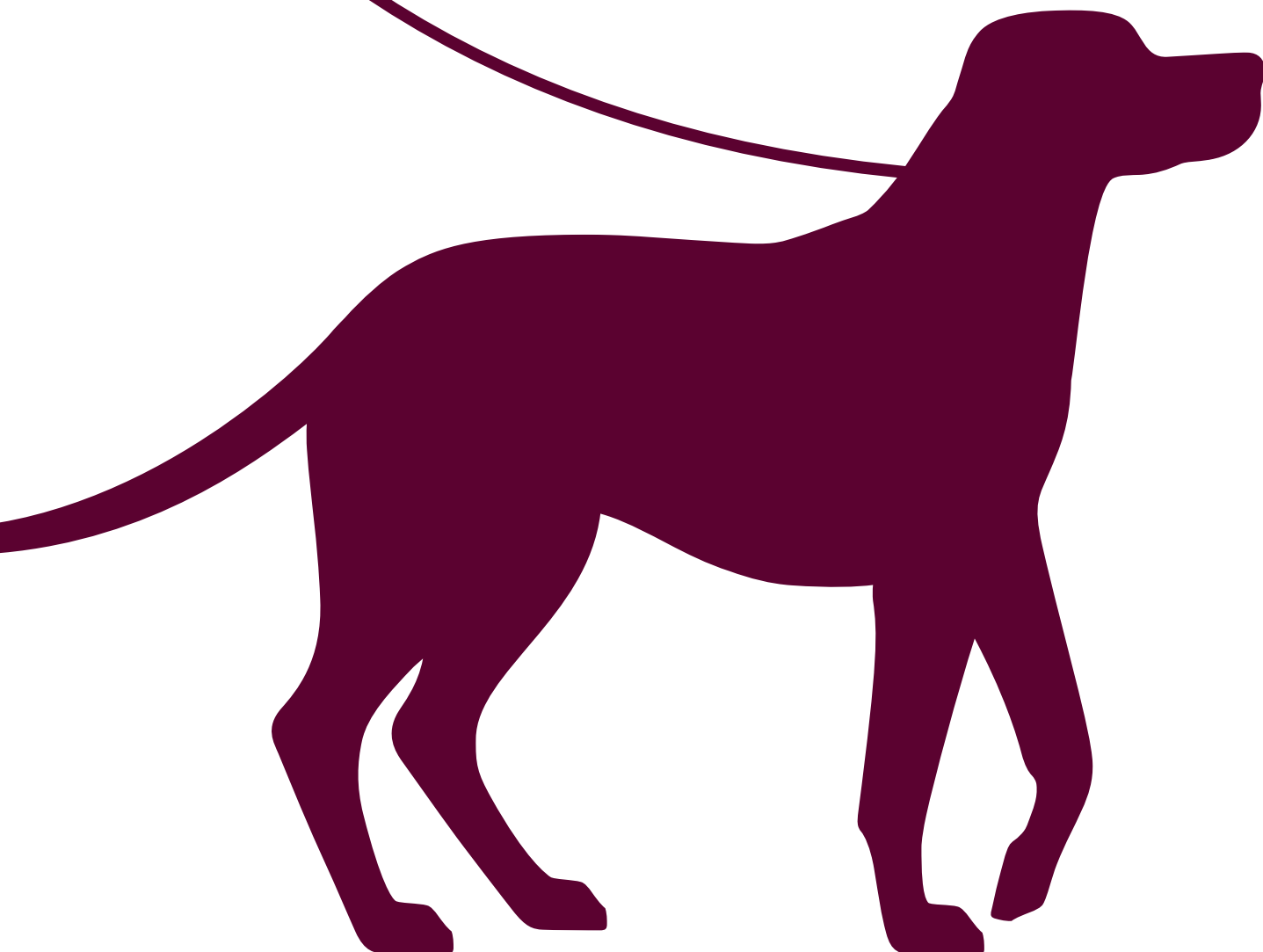
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- ⁵¹ Howell, H., BaslingtonDavies, A., Mills, D. S. & Hogue, T. E. (2025). Risk factors for humandirected aggression by dogs: The human side of the problem. A two-part systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 284, 106552.
- ⁵² Fernandez, E. J. (2024). The least inhibitive, functionally effective (LIFE) model: A new framework for ethical animal training practices. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 71, 6368.
- ⁵³ Virginia Tech Research Group. (2023). *Context-dependent learning and transfer in domestic dogs*. Virginia Tech Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences.
- ⁵⁴ Lind, E. (2015). *Lerngesetze verstehen und anwenden*. Nerdlen/Daun: Kynos Verlag. p. 203.

03

Handling dogs



03.1

Management, proactive action and prevention

Learning objectives

- **I am able to proactively support my dog in difficult situations and when it is overwhelmed. I am aware of the various actions that can be taken.**
- **I recognise my dog's threshold and make sure that it is not exceeded.**
- **I understand that I can use management techniques to prevent problems caused by my dog's insecurities, fears, anger or frustration.**
- **I know how I can help my dog to relax when it shows signs of stress.**
- **I recognise the signs of fear and/or aggression in my dog and am able to react correctly in each situation.**
- **I know what a friendly greeting between people and dogs looks like.**

Management

Appropriate management techniques by dog owners prevent undesired behaviour from occurring. This is because if a dog repeatedly displays undesired behaviour (e.g. barking at other dogs or passers-by, stealing food, chasing cats), this behaviour will unfortunately be practised and reinforced.

Management can consist of simple techniques and has no detrimental effects if it is implemented with care. In order to use these techniques successfully, however, a certain degree of foresight, competence and experience is required, for example in reading the dog's body language and assessing its current condition.

Dog owners support their dogs with management and appropriate training so that they can display and learn desired behaviour. Once the training has been successfully completed, the management techniques can be reduced. In the best case scenario, they will even become unnecessary.

In everyday life, it is not always possible to recognise and control everything in good time. The dog may overreact and display undesired behaviour, such as barking or pulling strongly on the lead. In this case, the dog should be quickly and calmly removed from the situation, as it cannot learn anything useful under these circumstances.

Management at home

Effective prevention starts at home. This not only prevents undesired behaviour, but also ensures the safety of the dog and third parties (see Chapter 03.3).¹

Examples

- A privacy screen on the window facing the street prevents Luna from noticing external stimuli that she would bark at.
- A door gate prevents Kiro from stealing food in the kitchen and endangering his health.
- Securing Luna with a short lead (house lead) prevents unwanted behaviour when visitors are present.

Management outside the home

Dog owners should know how well trained their dog is and, especially when out walking, be able to assess which stimuli could cause their dog to react excessively, such as children running quickly and shouting loudly, other dogs, horses, cyclists, darkness, etc. Problems can largely be prevented by acting with foresight and consideration.

Examples of management techniques while out and about

- Keeping the dog on a lead (a long-line lead if necessary)
- Increasing the distance
- Standing with the dog by your side
- Passing at an appropriate distance
- Walking in an arc with your dog
- Leaving the situation together or turning back
- Positioning yourself between the dog and the stimulus (without threatening the dog)
- Using cues that have already been taught
- Recalling “simple” behaviours that the dog knows well (e.g. the dog’s favourite cues or stop/reorientation signals)
- Giving the dog an alternative task
- Using relaxation techniques
- Distracting the dog, for example with food, a game or an appealing task, if the dog has not yet reached the required level of training and a situation is so difficult that ...
 - ... the above techniques cannot be implemented
 - ... taught cues cannot be used
 - ... there is no way to physically avoid the situation

Techniques vary depending on the dog and the situation. In the presence of third parties, it is always advisable to err on the side of caution and take (safety) measures that may ultimately prove unnecessary.

Examples

- Out on a walk, a group of riders approach Luna, who is running free. Mr Zürcher calls Luna to him, puts her on a lead, stands to one side at a safe distance and lets her perform her favourite exercise, “sit”, until the group has passed.
- Kiro and Mrs Schweizer encounter another dog and its human. Mrs Schweizer puts Kiro on the lead and guides him past the oncoming dog and human at a sufficient distance. This makes the encounter more relaxed.
- Kiro is afraid of children, especially if they are loud and hectic. On his walk, he comes across a group of children playing loudly. Mrs Schweizer knows that Kiro is overwhelmed and can’t stay calm. She therefore immediately guides him to a distance where he feels comfortable and can remain calm. This creates a situation that is a good training experience for Kiro: he can watch the children quietly. The children can run past safely without being frightened by a barking dog.
- Mrs Schweizer is riding with Kiro in a full cable car gondola. It’s cramped and noisy in here. Mrs Schweizer knows that this could be difficult for him, so she stands in a corner of the gondola and holds out a liver sausage paste for him to lick as a preventative measure.

Threshold

The term “threshold” refers to the point at which a dog becomes so stressed that its emotions take over, its ability to think and control its impulses declines, and it becomes difficult or almost impossible for it to recall what it has learned.

Above the threshold, many dogs react more emotionally and less rationally (almost irrationally), and are no longer able to execute trained cues and/or accept food.

It takes good observation skills to recognise when stimuli are threatening to overwhelm the dog and it is approaching its threshold. Small, often brief signs indicate that the dog is becoming increasingly agitated, stressed or even anxious (see Chapters 01.4 and 01.5). In order to respond promptly with suitable management techniques, dog owners should pay close attention to these subtle signals.²

Example

A person on crutches comes towards Kiro in a narrow alley. Kiro slows his pace and stops. He raises his head and tail slightly and directs his gaze towards the oncoming person. Mrs Schweizer realises that Kiro is feeling uncomfortable and that he is approaching his threshold. She supports him with the trained cue “to the side”, creating distance between him and the oncoming person. Kiro manages to wait calmly until the person has passed him. Mrs Schweizer rewards him for his cooperation.

Managing interactions with other people

If strangers want to interact with the dog, for example by greeting or petting it, it is up to the dog’s human to assess whether the dog wants this. They should politely explain to the stranger whether it is fine to approach the dog and how they should do so. It should be noted that most dogs find it unpleasant and threatening when someone leans over them and/or strokes or pats them on the head.³ The dog’s humans observe the interaction and stop it as soon as the dog shows increased calming signals or avoidance behaviour.

Example

Encounters with people put Kiro in such a high state of excitement that he jumps up at them. This is why Mrs Schweizer walks him past passers-by at a safe distance and also practises desired behaviour in controlled situations, such as standing or sitting in a relaxed position and carrying toys.

Dog owners face a particular challenge when it comes to preventing incidents involving children. Children often unintentionally behave in ways that make them appear threatening to dogs. This is true even for dogs that have been sufficiently socialised with children.⁴

Examples

- Children can move around frantically and make a lot of noise.
- The fine motor skills of small children are not yet fully developed, so their movements are unintentionally rough.
- Children approach the dog in a straight line, bend over it and look it directly in the eyes, which may make the dog feel threatened.

Letting children and dogs spend time together unsupervised poses many dangers. Supervision by a competent adult who understands the dog’s body language and intervenes early if necessary helps to prevent accidents between children and dogs.

If no responsible adults can be present, children and dogs must be separated by means of management techniques such as house leads, barriers or closed doors. This is especially true if the children are still too young to understand and follow the rules. Incidentally, most dog bites involving children occur at home with the family dog.⁵

An example of management

At a child’s birthday party, some of the invited children run into the living room to eat cake. Mrs Schweizer knows that Kiro will be upset. She proactively prevents this by offering him a tasty chew on his blanket in the separate kitchen. From here, Kiro can watch the wild goings-on in the living room from a safe distance and chew something to calm himself down at the same time.

Examples of sensible rules for children:

- The dog must not be disturbed when it is lying on its bed.
- The dog must not be disturbed when it is sleeping.
- The dog must not be disturbed when it is eating.
- The dog must not be touched when it is holding something in its mouth.
- If the dog moves away while being stroked, it must not be followed.
- The dog must only ever be touched with one hand; the movements should be gentle and calm.

With guidance, children can learn which interactions are pleasant for the dog and which shared activities can be enjoyed by both them and the dog.

Example

- Mr Zürcher has an eight-year-old niece. Lisa loves dogs and would like to spend time with Luna. Mr Zürcher never leaves the two of them alone and shows Lisa games that are fun for everyone, such as hiding and searching for food or toys.

Managing encounters with other dogs

As a general rule, you should put your dog on a lead immediately if an oncoming dog is on a lead. As dogs are restricted in their movements by a lead, it is advisable not to allow dogs on leads to make direct contact.

Contact with unfamiliar dogs can be stressful. However, there are also dogs that are very sociable and friendly and enjoy contact or opportunities to play with other dogs.⁶ If this is desired by both dogs and their humans, they should move in the same direction together with the dogs on the lead and only release the dogs once the initial excitement has subsided.

During the interaction, the dogs' body language should be observed closely; pauses or a termination of the interaction should occur at an early stage.

Example

Kiro and Mrs Schweizer encounter another dog and its human while out walking. The dog is on a lead and slowly approaches Kiro with friendly body language and a loose lead. Both dogs seem to want to make contact in a relaxed manner. Mrs Schweizer discusses with her counterpart to what extent off-lead contact is desired for both dogs. The dogs are then allowed to greet each other in a friendly manner off the lead.

More about this topic

In case of overreactions (reactivity) towards other dogs or in general during walks:

- Lismont, K. (2017). Hund trifft Hund. Cadmos Verlag.
- Lismont, K. (2020). Gassibuch für besondere Hunde. Cadmos Verlag.

For a harmonious coexistence between dogs and children:

- Lunzer, B. & Aupperle, N. (2022). Schwanger mit Hund! Canimos Verlag.
- Verebes, A., Rehberger, M. & Baier, A. (2017). Verstehen, Staunen, Trainieren, Entdecken (3 Bände). Canimos Verlag.
- <https://www.hundebisspraevention.ch>
- <https://codex-hund.ch/eltern-und-kinder>

03.2

Aids

Learning objectives

- **I know which aids I can use with my dog and am familiar with their advantages and disadvantages.**
- **I know what to look out for when using the aids mentioned.**
- **I know which aids and applications are prohibited by Swiss animal welfare legislation, even if they are available on the market.**

Permitted aids

The following aids may be used:

- Harness
- Collar
- Short lead, long lead, retractable lead/flexi-lead
- Dog whistle
- Standard muzzle
- Muzzle strap (nylon mouth strap) – for short-term use
- Headcollar

All aids must be selected to suit the dog's individual physique or head shape.

Their condition must be checked regularly: many materials can become brittle over time due to wear and tear, cold temperatures, UV radiation or ageing. In this case, they must be replaced for safety reasons.

Harnesses

Harnesses are available in many different models and materials. Some models are adjustable in size and can be customised. As not every model is suitable for every body type, expert advice is recommended. Positive reinforcement should be used to train dogs to get used to putting on and wearing a harness.

The following features characterise a suitable harness for everyday use:

- The harness allows the dog to move freely.
- The padding on the harness prevents pressure points and chafing.
- Connecting or fastening rings and buckles do not lie directly on the dog's fur.
- The foremost point of the harness rests on the sternum.
- The harness ends with the belly strap on the ribs, approx. three finger widths behind the armpits. It can cause pain if it rests behind the rib cage.
- So-called "safety harnesses" have two belly straps, both of which must also lie on the ribcage. The second belly strap prevents the dog from wriggling out of the harness. These harnesses are highly recommended for anxious dogs or dogs that have recently been adopted from animal rescues (abroad) and whose fear response to new stimuli is difficult to assess. Additional safety can be provided with a second lead attached to the collar.

Professional guidance is recommended.



Correctly fitting harness



Correctly fitting safety harness

Advantages

- The pressure is distributed across the dog's chest and shoulders, and it doesn't put strain on the more sensitive neck area. A harness is preferable to a collar, especially for dogs that are not yet able to walk on a lead or have problems in the neck area, for example respiratory problems or cervical spine issues.

Disadvantages

- Large and heavy dogs are more difficult to secure and control with a harness, especially if they react strongly to stimuli and pull violently on the lead.
- An ill-fitting harness is uncomfortable and restricts movement.

For certain search tasks or dog sledding, there are special harnesses that distribute the pressure even better across the entire body when a dog is pulling something. Everyday harnesses are not suitable for sled dogs.

Collars

Mindful lead handling and reward-based lead training are particularly important when the dog is wearing a collar. The collar must be selected so that the dog cannot slip out of it in stressful situations. Expert advice is recommended when purchasing a lead.

Leading by collar is not suitable for dogs that have problems with their airways or cervical spine, or for very small, delicate dogs such as Chihuahuas.

The following features characterise a suitable collar:

- It has a soft lining.
- It is about as wide as the dog's nose.

All collars have the following advantages:

- They can be put on quickly.
- They give the dog freedom of movement.
- They are well accepted by most dogs (without extensive habituation training).

Disadvantages

- For dogs that pull very hard on the lead or jump forward unexpectedly, a collar puts pressure on the sensitive neck area.
- In particular, if dog owners use outdated training methods such as jerking on the lead, this can cause (irreparable) damage to the neck area.^{7, 8}

Advantages and disadvantages of different models

Collar with "plug-in fastener"/"click fastener"

Advantages

- Can be opened at any time and taken off the dog, even if it gets caught on something.
- Can be put on and taken off relatively quickly.

Disadvantages

- Dogs with a narrow head can easily slip out of the collar.
- Be careful with cheap models: the fasteners are not always stable and can open suddenly.

Collar with “belt buckle fastener”/“pin buckle fastener”

Advantages

- Particularly stable and robust.
- Stay at their set size, even under strong tension.

Disadvantages

- Dogs with a narrow head in particular can easily slip out of the collar.
- If the dog’s collar gets caught on something, it can only be opened with a knife to free the dog from its predicament.
- They take a relatively long time to put on and take off.

Martingale collar (limited slip collar)/choke collar with stopper

Advantages

- Very quick to put on and take off.
- Dogs with narrow heads cannot slip out. Can be used as a safety backup if required, e.g. in combination with a double-ended lead and a harness.

Disadvantages

- Hangs very loosely around the neck when the dog is running free, increasing the risk of snagging. In this case, it can only be opened with a knife.
- The stopper must be adjusted to the dog’s individual neck circumference, otherwise the collar will act as a choke collar (which is prohibited by law).
- Not suitable for small, delicate dogs.

Leads

Leads ensure the safety of dogs and their environment in a wide variety of situations; that makes them essential. They are available in numerous different designs.

The following points should be noted:

- The material should sit comfortably in the dog owner’s hand. It is advisable to try out and compare different leads.
- The weight of the lead and the size of the snap hook should be appropriate for the dog’s body weight.
- The length of the lead should suit the situation and the dog: dog owners must be able to restrain their dog on a lead. As the lead gets longer, it becomes more difficult for the human to withstand the dog’s pull, especially if it jerks the lead suddenly with force.
- Long leads should ideally be conspicuous, for example in bright colours, and therefore easily visible to third parties such as cyclists or joggers. This helps to avoid lead-related accidents.
- In urban environments, especially along roads, short leads – such as double-ended leads – are recommended.

Double-ended leads

Leads that are fitted with a snap hook at both ends are called double-ended leads. They are usually around two to three metres long and can be adjusted in length by hooking on the snap hook. This makes it particularly easy to tie the dog to a post or hook.

Retractable leads/“Flexi leads”

Retractable leads work by means of a reel in a housing, which automatically winds and unwinds the lead to suit the dog’s range of movement. A stop button can be used to fix the lead at the desired length. In order to protect the neck area of small dogs in particular, retractable leads are preferably attached to the harness rather than the collar.

Advantages

- The dog has more freedom of movement without the lead sagging or having to be gathered up manually by the dog owner.
- For older or calm dogs, the retractable lead can be used to create a relaxed exploratory walk.

Disadvantages

- A retractable lead is not secure enough for dogs that are very heavy, reactive or hectic.
- Using your free hand to grab the cord can lead to injuries.
- The lead can cause injuries to other dogs or people if it gets wrapped around them and constricts them.
- If the stop button is used incorrectly or if it fails, the dog may run uncontrollably into a dangerous situation (road, other dogs, children, etc.).
- Not suitable for teaching a dog how to walk on a lead.
- Not suitable for training situations such as dog school.

Long-line leads

Long-line leads are long leads that also give the dog greater freedom and can be used in a variety of ways, for example on exploratory walks, hikes or in training situations. Long-line leads should be attached to a well-fitting harness to protect the neck area. Users should have an expert explain in detail how these leads are best used prior to using them for the first time.

Advantages

- The dog is given plenty of room to move.
- Well suited for training situations.
- Unlike a retractable lead, the long-line lead can be held at any point. This allows the dog's range of movement to be restricted quickly and safely by gripping the lead if necessary.

Disadvantages

- Unlike a retractable lead, the user must handle the entire long-line lead manually.
- With fast and powerful dogs, long-line leads pose a risk of injury to humans.
Gloves can protect against this.

Whistles

Dog whistles are ideal for establishing a recall cue, for example, that can be heard by your dog even over long distances. The whistles available on the market come in different frequencies. Using whistles with frequencies that are also audible to humans is advisable. High frequencies are better perceived over long distances. Please note: this kind of whistle can be unpleasant for both humans and dogs at close range. Increase the volume gradually during training.

Advantages

- The high frequencies of a dog whistle carry further than the human voice and can be heard better by dogs, even when there is background noise such as wind.
- A well-trained recall cue made with a whistle is something that can be used by the whole family (the whistle should always sound as similar as possible).

Disadvantages

- You always have to have the whistle with you. Since the whistle can be forgotten, practising a recall word in addition to the whistle is a good idea.

Muzzles

Every dog should be accustomed to wearing a muzzle. There are many good reasons for wearing a muzzle:

- for dogs that may react aggressively, a muzzle helps ensure the safety of everyone involved.
- A muzzle can be used to secure your dog during visits to the vet or the dog groomer.
- If a dog is seriously injured, it makes sense to secure it with a muzzle. Any dog can bite when it is in pain.
- Muzzles also serve as a feeding guard, for example in the event of poison bait warnings or during an exclusion diet.
- Some of the countries bordering Switzerland have legal requirements that dogs must wear a muzzle on public transport, for example.

Various models are available on the market. The requirements for a muzzle depend on its intended use. Before a muzzle is used, the dog should become accustomed to wearing it through the use of positive reinforcement training. Professional assistance should be sought when choosing a muzzle and during training.

The following features characterise a good muzzle:

- A muzzle must fit the dog's individual head shape so that no pressure points develop, even when it is worn for long periods.
- It must be possible for the dog to pant and drink sufficiently.
- Rewards such as pieces of food can be given to the dog through the muzzle, except in the case of muzzles with a feeding guard.
- The dog's field of vision must not be restricted.
- The muzzle must fit so that it cannot be pulled down over the snout, otherwise the dog will be able to free itself.
- In the event of aggressive behaviour, a head strap and a connection between the muzzle and collar provide additional safety.



This dog is wearing a mesh muzzle.

Muzzle strap (nylon mouth strap)

This type of muzzle holds the dog's snout closed. It may only be used for a short time (a few minutes). This is not an alternative to a conventional muzzle for longer periods of use.

Advantages

- These straps can be used at the vet for a short period of time, for example for a vaccination.
- They can be customised to the size of the dog's snout.

Disadvantage:

- They do not allow the dog to pant – something they do when stressed or to regulate body temperature in hot weather or during exertion, for example – or to drink. This can lead to overheating in dogs and can therefore give rise to dangerous situations.



This dog is wearing one of these muzzle straps.

Leading aids such as headcollars

A headcollar is a leading aid that the dog wears over its snout and head. Before use, the dog must be familiarised with the headcollar through appropriate training. Dog owners must also learn how to correctly support and gently guide their dog with the headcollar. Professional assistance with the choice of headcollar, preparatory training and correct use is strongly recommended.

Advantages

- Dogs can be easily guided and controlled with a headcollar.¹⁰
- The headcollar can give dog owners more security, especially in the case of strong or reactive dogs.
- Better control can ensure the safety of third parties.
- A headcollar can be an advantage when teaching the dog to walk on a lead.
- The dog can still pant, drink and carry objects.

Disadvantages

- The dog must be trained thoroughly to wear the headcollar before it can be used.
- Incorrect or rough use can cause health problems, pain and stress in dogs.
- A headcollar does not stop a dog from biting.



This dog is wearing a headcollar.

Prohibited aids

Chapter 06 deals with the legal basis of prohibited “aids”. In Switzerland, the use of any “aids” that cause injury or significant pain to dogs, irritate them severely or frighten them is strictly prohibited. For example:

- Slip collars without stoppers/choke collars without stoppers
- Spiked collars, prong collars
- Spray collars that use chemical substances/fragrances such as lemon water
- Anti-barking devices that spray fragrances, water or compressed air
- Electrifying devices such as Teletac or vibrating collars
- Devices that emit unpleasant acoustic signals such as Pet Gentle or Pet Corrector
- Muzzle straps (nylon muzzle loop), except for short periods
- Leading aids that cause the dog considerable pain, for example by constricting it

Unfortunately, these “aids” are still used in certain television programmes that do not take into account the latest developments in canine science (the study of dogs).

The sale of such “aids” by specialist shops and online shops is not prohibited, nor is it forbidden to purchase them. This is due to the legal distinction between sale/trade and use. However, their use is prohibited by law (see Chapter 06). Anyone who uses these “aids” is liable to prosecution, even if they were purchased legally.

03.3

Organising everyday life

Learning objectives

- **I know how to organise everyday life with my dog in a dog-friendly way.**
- **I know how to plan a walk based on the dog's needs, and I have examples of this.**
- **I know various ways to keep my dog occupied in a meaningful way.**
- **I know how to recognise when my dog is overwhelmed or understimulated.**
- **I know what problems overwhelming or understimulation can lead to.**
- **I know how to get my dog used to grooming.**
- **I know that dogs need routines when they are left alone, and I can create these for them.**

This chapter gives dog owners an insight into how to organise their dog's everyday life. The dog's needs play a key role in the organisation of this daily routine (see Chapter 01.2).

When a dog moves into a new household, the other household members usually already have a fixed daily routine. Getting a dog used to its new home can require a lot of patience, consideration and often also adjustments to the owner's own needs. This is especially true for puppies or dogs from animal rescues, as well as dogs that are afraid of strangers, cannot yet be left alone at home, or feel uncomfortable when travelling by car.

If you do not want your dog to enter certain rooms, such as the children's room or the kitchen, these should be separated with door gates from the outset. Barriers, puppy pens or house leads are simple management techniques for preventing undesired behaviour from occurring. (see Chapter 03.1).

Generally speaking, a dog's daily routine can be divided into the following phases:

- Sleep and rest phases
- Activities at home such as feeding and joint activities such as playing, training sessions or grooming
- Time without attention at home and when out and about
- Time alone at home (dogs must be trained to be left by themselves first)
- Activities while out and about such as walks, everyday companionship, social contact with other dogs, attending dog training school, joint excursions, sports activities, etc.

Sleep and rest phases

Dogs spend a large part of the day sleeping and resting (see Chapter 01.2). Dogs should be allowed to choose where they go to rest as far as possible. Comfortable spots should be offered in suitable locations. In general, dogs should not be disturbed while in their resting place.

Every dog has its own preferences when it comes to the surfaces it likes to lie on – warm, cool, hard or soft – and how far away from its humans it wants to be. Your dog might prefer to sleep cosily on its dog bed in the living room, on the sofa or on its dog cushion next to your bed in the bedroom. It is up to dog owners themselves to decide whether and to what extent their dog is allowed to stretch out on a sofa or a human bed. If they are fine with this, then it doesn't pose any problems.¹¹

A suitable resting place has the following properties:

- The dog is sheltered from excessive stimuli, so it is somewhat removed from the action without being isolated. A corner of the living room, for example, is a good place to rest. A less suitable example would be an entrance area that all household members pass through several times a day.
- To allow the dog to rest, it should be shielded from floor-to-ceiling windows and the sight of televisions in use, if necessary.

If the dog gets little or no rest at home, the causes should be investigated. Specialists can help here.

Activities at home

Short training sequences in the form of basic exercises, search tasks or tricks, getting used to grooming and short play sessions are part of everyday activities with your dog and are a suitable addition to walks and activities out and about.¹²

Grooming and vet training

Many dogs do not like being held during grooming or veterinary examinations. They feel cornered and threatened; in a worst-case scenario, they experience a loss of control. Step-by-step training is recommended here as a result. The dog learns that these restrictions on its freedom of movement are not bad, but are associated with a pleasant reward.

Some examples of grooming and care measures that should be practised in small steps beforehand

- Drying paws and coat
- Showering
- Checking and cleaning paws, teeth, ears and eyes
- Opening the mouth
- Trimming claws
- Searching for and removing ticks
- Coat care depending on coat condition – brushing, combing, clipping, trimming

Visiting the vet several times, even without a medical reason, is beneficial in that it gives the dog positive experiences. Regular medical training is helpful. For dogs with severe anxiety, professional guidance from a specialist is recommended.¹³

Feeding

Dogs should feel secure in the knowledge that they will receive sufficient food on a regular basis. This is important for their well-being. The times can be varied slightly so that the dog remains flexible. The number of meals and the amount of food is individual and depends on how much the dog eats additionally during walks or training sessions. The portions of food can be divided up so that the dog is allowed to work for some of it. Experiments with goats have shown that they prefer to work for their food rather than simply eating it, and dogs also display a strong tendency towards this behaviour.^{14, 15}

Examples

- Luna's dry food is scattered around the flat in the morning or, if the weather is nice, in the garden, and she is then allowed to search for it. In the evening she gets a portion from her bowl.
- Mr Zürcher sometimes takes some of the dog's breakfast with him on walks in the food pouch. Luna is allowed to search for the food pouch while they are out and about and earn her food that way.
- Mrs Schweizer feeds Kiro wet food in the morning. She distributes a portion of wet food into small bowls. Then she places the bowls around the house and Kiro is allowed to search for them.
- Kiro often gets some of his dry food in the evening on the snuffle mat and some during training. Mrs Schweizer practises everyday cues at home, grooms Kiro regularly and practices pet first aid, rewarding him with the rest of his food.

Time without attention while out and about

In everyday life, it is often unavoidable for a dog to have to stay in one place for a certain period of time. This is why blanket training is part of every dog's basic training. The dog learns to lie down on a designated blanket and calmly remain there until the cue is given to get up. Friendly, reliable blanket training also makes visits to restaurants or private homes easier.

Time without attention at home

There are times in a dog's everyday life when the human cannot pay attention to it (e.g. working from home, looking after children, guests, household chores). The dog is encouraged to use these times as rest periods. This kind of training should begin soon after the dog moves in. Training is effective if it is designed in such a way that the dog learns to relax until its humans are able to actively spend time with it again.

Being alone at home

The aim of training a dog to be alone is to enable it to relax when it is home alone and to learn that its humans will always return. It makes sense to start training a dog to be alone after it has moved in, once it feels safe in its new home and can relax. Because it is unnatural for them to be separated from their humans and to be alone, dogs need to gradually learn to relax when left alone. In more specific terms, this means that the dog is not left alone at all during the first few weeks and later, after suitable training, they can be left alone for short periods (a few minutes) and only gradually for longer periods. That makes it essential to arrange for somebody to cover any gaps, e.g. family members, neighbours, dog-sitting, etc. in the first few weeks.

The following points should be noted when training a dog to be alone:

- A suitable room will become associated with positive emotions over a long period of time. This can also be part of a room that has been partitioned off (see [Chapter 06](#) regarding minimum dimensions). To help the dog feel particularly comfortable in the room, it should be offered food search games, chews or other quiet activities. At the beginning of the training, the human should be in the immediate vicinity of the dog, but should not actively participate.
- The room in question should have a comfortable place for the dog to lie down and a bowl of fresh water. The law prohibits locking dogs in a crate while they are alone (see [Chapter 06](#)).
- The dog should have had toilet time before the training session. Its basic needs for sufficient exercise, satiety, well-being and freedom from pain and anxiety must be met.
- At the beginning, the dog is trained to be alone in the home while the human leaves for a short period of time, e.g. to go to the toilet or to the laundry room.
- The dog must be able to perceive that the human is leaving: the human should not sneak away.
- The dog should be relaxed when left alone. This can be monitored with a surveillance camera.
- The length of time spent alone should be varied and extended in small steps.
- Upon the human's return, the dog should be greeted calmly.
- More detailed instructions can be obtained from specialists and found in specialised books.

Barking and howling, persistent restlessness, heavy panting, destruction of objects and/or defecating or urinating in the home are clear signs of separation anxiety. However, some dogs suffer in silence; they may sit behind the door and wait, for example. It is not uncommon for a surveillance camera to reveal just how stressful being alone really is for the dog.

Dogs affected by separation anxiety suffer enormously and can panic. This is an animal welfare issue and affects many dogs.¹⁶ Dog owners have a duty to help the affected dog by providing systematic and competent training (see [Chapter 01.7](#)) and/or to arrange for care if they are absent.

Activities while out and about

Walks offer an opportunity to fulfil a dog's needs for activity and exercise. Dogs that enjoy socialising with other dogs can express this through appropriate encounters such as brief greetings, going for walks together, sniffing around or playing.

Dog owners should make sure that the duration, route and length of the walk are appropriate for their dog's condition on a given day as well as its age, state of health, breed, experience and habits. Unfamiliar experiences, exciting situations and encounters during the walk may require adjustments to the route, such as breaks, shortcuts or changes.

The dog should learn that being outside doesn't just mean excitement and activity. That's why it makes sense to take breaks, so the dog can relax and observe its surroundings. Puppies, adolescent dogs, anxious dogs and many dogs from animal rescues in particular need a lot of time to take in their surroundings and process their impressions.

A lively environment does not require long distances, but rather calm walking and opportunities for breaks. Sniffing is an important part of every walk, as dogs rely heavily on their sense of smell for guidance (see [Chapter 01.1](#)).

Walks in familiar surroundings should be alternated with walks in new places or with new experiences.

If the dog returns reliably when it hears the recall cue, it should be taken to areas where it can run freely.

If recall has not yet been sufficiently trained, the dog can be given a larger range of movement with a long lead.¹⁷

Some ideas for meaningful activities while out and about

- Basic training, e.g. recall, positions, stay
- Scattering pieces of food in a field
- Hiding pieces of food in the trunk of a tree
- Hiding and searching for objects, e.g. search items, food pouches or toys
- Searching for a hidden family member
- Playing together
- Exploring and walking on different surfaces, e.g. tree trunks, stones, gratings, stairs
- Tricks, e.g. sending the dog around trees, jumping over branches

Overexertion and understimulation

In many cases, too much and too little activity manifest themselves in a similar way. After lots of exciting activity, sufficient rest, for example in the form of a day of relaxation, is necessary to avoid overexertion.¹⁸

The following symptoms may also indicate a health problem, so a visit to the vet is recommended.

Possible symptoms of overexertion or understimulation

- Increased reactivity or lower stimulus threshold
- Rough play
- Running back and forth
- Chewing or eating inedible objects such as wood or stones
- Nervousness
- Difficulty calming down
- Digestive problems
- Increased scratching
- Whining and barking

More about this topic

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03.4

Code of Conduct

Learning objectives

- **I am familiar with the Code of Conduct of the Veterinary Office of the Canton of Zurich (“Hundecodex” (“Dog Code”)).**
- **I know how to behave responsibly with my dog in public.**
- **I know where and in which situations I have to put the dog on a lead.**
- **I know that I have to pick up and dispose of my dog’s faeces.**

Living with a dog brings responsibilities – not only towards the dog, but also towards other people, other animals and the environment.

Switzerland is generally very dog-friendly. Dogs are allowed to accompany “their” humans on public transport without a muzzle. They are welcome in most restaurants, and apart from grocery shops, dog owners are allowed to take their dogs into almost all shops. This is not a matter of course and is often not permitted in other countries. Dog owners should act with foresight and show consideration in order to maintain these dog-friendly conditions.

The canton of Zurich is densely populated and the number of dogs has increased in recent years. This leads to more interactions and increases the potential for conflict. This demanding environment places high demands on dogs and their owners. For dog owners, this means training and controlling their dogs so that they can move around safely and calmly in public.

The Code of Conduct of the Zurich Veterinary Office, referred to as the Hundecodex (“Dog Code”) (www.codex-hund.ch), aims to ensure conflict-free and respectful coexistence between dog owners, their dogs and society. Harmonious coexistence can only succeed if basic rules are observed by everyone, similar to road traffic regulations.

General rules of conduct

- Acting proactively is a prerequisite for avoiding conflicts.
- Dog owners must be able to control their dogs at all times, even when they are off the lead.
- Dog owners must have sufficient physical strength to restrain their dog if necessary.
- Dogs must be handled in such a way that they do not disturb or harass other people, animals or other dogs.

What constitutes a disturbance (harassment) varies from person to person. The decisive factor is how the person or animal concerned experiences the situation.

It is not uncommon for children, adults, other dogs and other animals to be afraid of strange dogs.

If this is apparent or is communicated, special consideration must be shown, for example by keeping the dog on a lead or keeping a greater distance.

Dogs are not allowed in the following places

- School buildings and playgrounds
- Sports fields (including playing fields)
- Swimming pools
- Cemeteries
- All places with signs indicating that dogs are prohibited

Large events such as village festivals, Christmas markets or concerts are stressful for the vast majority of dogs and harbour risks, for example in the form of discarded food or broken glass.

Dogs must be kept on a lead

- On sports fields, at schools and kindergartens, at playgrounds and in the vicinity of these places
- At railway stations and public transport stops
- In residential neighbourhoods
- On busy roads
- In public buildings
- In wildlife sanctuaries signposted as such
- In the forest and at the edge of the forest during breeding and nesting season
- In nature reserves
- If the dog has a contagious disease
- If the dog is in heat
- Anywhere with signs requiring dogs to be on a lead

For safety reasons, dogs should be kept on a lead

- In restaurants and beer gardens
- In confusing terrain
- In areas with high numbers of game animals or cats; this applies in particular to dogs with a prey drive
- On farms, at riding centres etc. or when passing these locations
- If the dog has not yet been sufficiently trained to respond to a recall cue
- When encountering unfamiliar dogs, especially if they are on a lead
- When encountering children; the dog should be kept on the side away from the child
- In the dark
- Whenever someone requests it

Rules of conduct when encountering people

- In the event of encounters with passers-by, joggers, cyclists and horse riders, for example, the dog should be led past on the opposite side. The distance should be adjusted to suit the situation.
- If there is no certainty that the dog will remain reliably and in close proximity to the dog owner during the entire encounter, it must be kept on a lead.

Rules of conduct when encountering dogs

Unpleasant situations between dogs are stressful, and a lack of consideration among dog owners is annoying. Dog owners should respect the needs of other dogs and their humans, such as avoiding contact or maintaining sufficient distance. There are many good reasons why contact is undesired, e.g. dogs in heat, infectious diseases, injuries, fears or aggressive behaviour:

- Without mutual consent between dog owners, dogs should not be allowed to come into contact with each other, especially if they are on a lead.
- If a dog on a lead appears, your dog must be called back immediately and without being asked, and also put on a lead.
- If you are walking with several dogs, you must be able to control all of them.
- If a person with a group of dogs comes towards you, stop at a suitable distance so that the oncoming person has enough time to call all the dogs and put them on a lead.
- If unfamiliar dogs are in contact with each other, whether playing or interacting tensely, you should not allow your dog to run towards them. To avoid conflicts, your own dog should be kept on a lead and led past the situation at a sufficient distance.
- You should only approach if the dog's human has been informed and agrees to this. Approaching unnoticed can frighten a dog.

Rules of conduct for dogs off the lead

If a dog is allowed to run free, it is particularly important that its human pays full attention and acts with foresight. Dangers or situations with conflict potential should be identified before the dog notices them so that you can react in good time and, for example, call the dog to you:

- A dog off the lead must be kept within sight of its human at all times and within a reliable recall distance.
- The dog must not disturb or harass other people or animals (including other dogs).
- In places with poor visibility, such as crossroads or hilltops, the dog must be kept right next to its human. It is impossible to predict what the dog might encounter on the other side, such as children, other dogs, wild animals or cars.
- Dogs with prey drive should only be let off the lead in suitable terrain.
- Dogs must never be left unattended in publicly accessible areas.

Rules of conduct for encounters with other animals

- Dogs must not harass or chase animals.
- When horses and similar animals are approaching, the dog must be called back and put on a lead. Many riders appreciate it when the dog owner stands to one side with the dog.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead in the vicinity of grazing animals and livestock.

Rules of conduct for dogs in nature

- In the canton of Zurich, dogs must be kept on a lead in the forest and at a distance of up to 50 metres from the edge of the forest during the breeding and nesting season from 1 April to 31 July.
- Dogs with prey drive must be kept on a lead all year round in areas with large numbers of game animals.
- During the growing season, dogs are not allowed in tall grass or on farmland.
- Objects used in play, such as toys or sticks, are not to be left in fields.
- Dogs must not dig holes on agricultural land.

Rules of conduct when visiting a restaurant

- The dog must be kept on a lead.
- Before entering, the dog owner should clarify whether dogs are welcome.
- If the dog is wet or dirty, it must be dried and cleaned before entering the restaurant.
- In the restaurant, the dog must be positioned so that it does not obstruct anyone and neither the staff nor other guests or other people present can trip over it.

Rules of conduct for dogs and children

Enriching friendships can develop between dogs and children, provided that certain conditions are met. Encounters with children in public spaces must be managed responsibly ([see Chapter 03.1](#)). On the one hand, children are sometimes impulsive, loud and move quickly. This can frighten dogs or encourage them to run after the children. On the other hand, there are children who are afraid of dogs and don't want any contact.

For the well-being and safety of children and dogs, the following points must be observed:

- Contact between children and dogs, even if they know each other very well, should always be supervised by an adult. This person should be able to read a dog's body language and intervene if necessary.
- If it is not possible to monitor the situation, measures to manage the situation, such as installing a door gate in front of the child's room, are advisable.
- When encountering children, the dog must be kept on a lead and walked on the side furthest away from the child.
- Schoolyards, playgrounds, forest kindergartens, etc. should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children and young people should only be allowed to walk dogs alone if they know the dog very well and are physically capable of restraining it. In addition, the dog should not display any signs of fear or aggression in everyday situations.

Picking up after your dog

It is a major nuisance when dog faeces are not picked up and disposed of. Dog faeces left lying around are also problematic from a health and hygiene perspective: parasites, such as the highly contagious *Giardia*, and other pathogens can spread easily. All it takes for them to spread is for a dog to sniff or step on a pile of faeces and later lick its paw.

On agricultural land, dog faeces can contaminate the feed of ruminants and horses. That makes it essential that they be removed.

Stepping in dog faeces is disgusting for everyone. It does not promote goodwill towards dogs and dog owners, especially among non-dog owners. The following rules of conduct are therefore particularly important:

- Dog owners should not allow their dogs to urinate in inappropriate places such as on bicycles, cars, flower pots or house entrances.
- Dog faeces must always be picked up immediately and as completely as possible. Many places offer free dog waste bags, and spares should ideally be carried.
- The waste bags must be disposed of correctly, i.e. in public rubbish bins or Robidog bins.

Behaviour in the event of conflicts

If all dog owners adhere to these simple rules of conduct, unpleasant situations, conflicts, injuries or even worse can be avoided.

Despite all precautions, mishaps and confrontations cannot always be avoided. In such cases, it helps to keep calm, seek to engage in friendly dialogue and apologise.

Contact details should be exchanged if injuries (due to falls, for example) or damage to property (such as torn clothing) have occurred – but also if dogs have clashed without any obvious injury, as bite injuries to dogs are often only discovered later.

The aim of the Hundecodex (“Dog Code”) is to ensure respectful and safe coexistence for all, based on mutual consideration.

The Veterinary Office of the Canton of Zurich would like to thank all dog owners for complying with its Hundecodex (“Dog Code”).

More about this topic

- Basic rules: www.codex-hund.ch/umgang-mit-hunden/verhaltensregeln
- Dog owners: www.codex-hund.ch/hundehalter/verhaltensregeln
- Children and dogs: www.codex-hund.ch/eltern-und-kinder/verhaltensregeln

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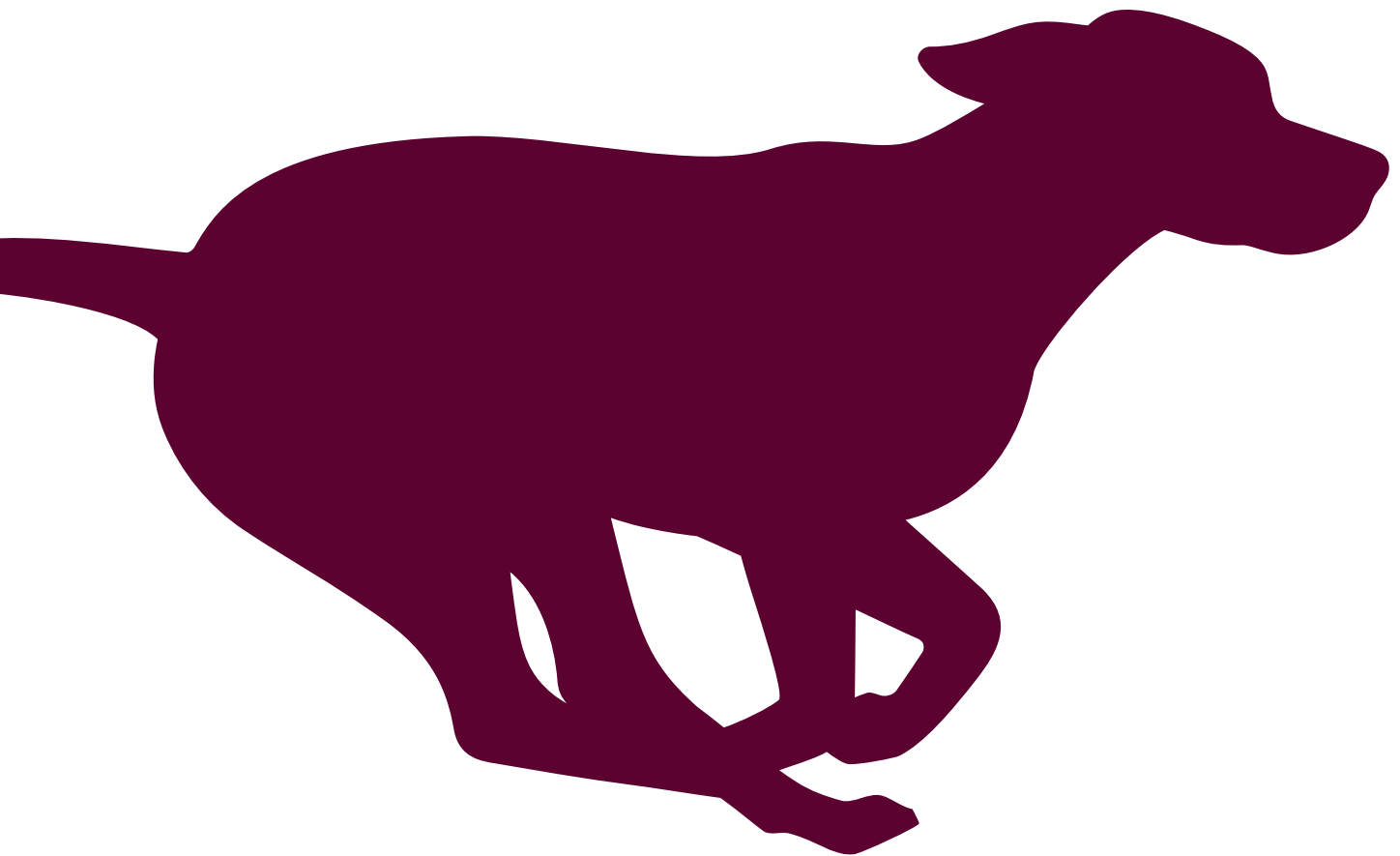
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04

Bringing home a dog



04.1

Fundamental principles

Learning objectives

- **I am aware that keeping a dog takes a lot of time and is very demanding.**
- **I am familiar with the financial costs involved over the course of a dog's life.**
- **I know that I have to provide adequate care for my dog's well-being.**
- **I am aware that getting a dog has an impact on all family members and existing pets.**

Living with a dog can be very enriching. This makes it all the more important to be aware of all the advantages and disadvantages before bringing one home.

The decision to get a dog means taking responsibility for a living being for around 10 to 15 years. If you are renting a flat, you must ensure that dogs are allowed before you bring one home. If you are regularly away for more than four hours at a time or if your dog suffers from separation anxiety, you will need to arrange for someone else to take care of it. One possibility would be to clarify whether the dog may be taken to work.

Keeping a dog requires that you invest time every day to provide attention, care, activity and exercise. The average amount of time required for an adult dog is around three hours per day. Getting a puppy settled in is particularly time-consuming in the first few weeks and months ([see Chapter 01.3](#)). Depending on the dog's personality and history, bringing home a second-hand dog or a rescue dog can also involve a lot of work for dog owners.

Children often want a dog without realising what this actually means. The responsibility for a dog lies with the parents, and they should be just as motivated to bring a dog into their lives as the children. Families should be aware that many family activities such as visits to the swimming pool, zoo or playground are no longer easily possible with a dog. There is a risk that the novelty will quickly wear off and that having to give things up out of consideration for the dog will become frustrating.

If other animals already live in the household, you should consider what impact a dog could have on them. Not every animal member of the family will welcome the arrival of a new dog. Introductions must be planned carefully, and it is impossible to predict whether the animals will get along and be able to live together without stress.

In addition to the time involved, the cost of a dog should not be underestimated. According to calculations by dog health insurance companies, this amounts to an average of at least 150 Swiss francs per month for a healthy dog, but can be many times higher. A healthy dog costs an estimated 15,000 to 30,000 Swiss francs over its entire lifetime. The costs of purchase and initial equipment are low compared to the financial expenses incurred throughout the dog's life. Here are a few examples:

- Food, chews
- Toys, other equipment
- Replacement of lead, collar, harness, dog bed
- Liability insurance
- Possibly health and accident insurance
- Dog tax
- Grooming costs
- Veterinary costs (regular costs, accidents, illnesses)
- Training (compulsory courses, advanced courses, activities, individual training for problem behaviour, etc.)
- Possibly external care
- Possibly a larger car (if the existing one is not big enough) and travel crate
- Possibly weatherproof clothing for the dog owners

Holidays must be organised well in advance. Not every holiday home allows dogs. To ensure that a holiday is a relaxing experience for both people and dogs, this information should be sought out in advance. Additional costs are often charged for dogs in holiday accommodations. In many tourist areas, dogs are not welcome during the high season (e.g. on beaches, on ski slopes, in restaurants, on public transport, etc.).

If you want to go on holiday without your dog, we recommend looking for a suitable and trustworthy dog sitter well in advance. It is also a good idea to take your dog there for a trial stay before you go on holiday. Many dog kennels and dog daycare centres are fully booked years in advance during school holidays or public holidays. In dog kennels, dogs usually have a completely different daily routine than at home. Spending time with lots of other dogs and lots of activity in a group setting can be stressful for many dogs, as can being alone for hours on end in an enclosed area without any family contact. Such dogs should not be placed in holiday care out of consideration for their well-being.

04.2

Choosing a dog

Learning objectives

- **I know that I should choose a dog that suits me and my lifestyle (e.g. dog-to-human strength ratio).**
- **I know that large and heavy dogs live shorter lives on average than small dogs.**
- **I know that large dogs develop more slowly than small dogs – and therefore reach social maturity later.**
- **I am aware of the advantages and disadvantages of adopting puppies, adolescent dogs, adult dogs and old dogs in terms of their needs, the time commitment required, previous experience, etc.**
- **I know what to look out for when buying a dog (from breeders, animal rescues, animal welfare organisations, private sellers).**
- **I know the dangers of buying dogs online.**
- **I am aware that cruel breeding practices exist and that these should not be supported.**
- **I know which breeds are banned in the canton of Zurich.**

If you want to share and enrich your life with a dog, you should think carefully about what kind of dog would suit you and your lifestyle.

The type of dog, its size, age and origin are decisive factors when choosing a dog. As these vary greatly, it is worth seeking advice from a specialist. Choosing a dog solely on the basis of its appearance is not advisable. It is recommended that a dog's adoption be contractually agreed with the party handing it over (breeder, animal rescue, previous owner, etc.). Any questions must be clarified before signing and the contract must be checked carefully.

Size of the dog

Large dogs are relatively strong and heavy. Anyone who takes on a large dog should therefore have sufficient physical strength to be able to restrain or even carry the dog in emergency situations. Large dogs reach social maturity a little later than smaller dogs and their life expectancy is slightly shorter.¹ Large dogs also need a little more space than small dogs, such as a larger crate in the car or a larger dog bed.

Age of the dog

Puppy

The advantage of adopting a puppy is that the little one gets to know its future living environment during the important socialisation period. The dog owners accompany the young dog's development and can influence it – however, this also means a lot of time and training (see [Chapter 01.3](#)).

Adolescent or adult dog

An adolescent or adult dog has significantly more learning experience than a dog adopted as a puppy. In the best case scenario, it will be an unproblematic dog that adapts well to its new living environment. However, if the conditions are less favourable, for example due to a lack of socialisation or insufficient habituation to the environment, the dog's owners must expect to invest considerable time and effort in training or even lifelong consideration of the dog's needs.

Older dog

Relationships with older dogs can be quite enriching. It is not uncommon for cohabitation to be even smoother: as a rule, older dogs are calmer and need more sleep. If you take in an older or elderly dog, you will probably have to expect higher veterinary costs. However, such costs can also be incurred for younger dogs.

Origin of the dog

Dogs from breeders

If you are interested in getting a puppy, you should visit potential breeders to get an idea of the quality of the puppies and choose the most convincing breeder. The aim is to get to know the mother dog with her puppies and, if possible, the breeder's other dogs. As described in [Chapter 01.3](#), puppies should be well cared for and carefully habituated to environmental stimuli, other dogs and people. A good breeder will appreciate it if puppy buyers ask lots of questions. The breeder will take a keen interest in the motivation behind the desire to have a dog and the living environment of the prospective owners. Once a suitable breeder has been found, it may be worth waiting longer for a puppy. Further information on recognising a reputable breeder can be found at the end of this chapter.

Privately owned dogs

If you are interested in a privately owned dog, you should visit it as often as possible in its familiar surroundings and get to know it. Several walks in busy areas outside its familiar home and/or a trial period are recommended. This allows you to find out lots of details about the dog's past, its strengths and its weaknesses. This information will help you to decide whether or not the dog is right for you.

Dogs online

Buying a dog online is strongly discouraged. There are many shady and untrustworthy offers on the Internet. They are often disguised as "sales by private owners" or as being from "hobby breeders". However, the chances are very high that these dogs, often "fashionable breeds", were "produced" in cruel breeding facilities: they are separated from their mothers far too early (before eight weeks) and brought into Switzerland illegally with a forged vaccination certificate or pedigree, for example.

Unscrupulous dealers also operate in Switzerland.

The puppies are often sick and are quickly pumped full of medication to make them look healthy when they are handed over. Some of them fall critically ill shortly afterwards and have to fight for their lives in an intensive care unit.

The dog's psyche is also irrevocably damaged by irresponsible rearing. Many of these dogs go on to have lifelong behavioural problems, which can be very stressful for both humans and dogs. If you try to save money on the purchase price, you are saving in the wrong place, as dogs like these can incur high veterinary costs and/or expenses for behavioural therapy. Demand determines supply. Anyone who buys a dog from an untrustworthy source is promoting cruelty to animals.

Rescue dogs

A competent animal welfare organisation will ensure that the dog's history is compatible with the prospective owner and their living environment. It helps to get to know the dog better by going for walks in various environments or with a non-binding trial period. Pity or external pressure are not good reasons to buy a dog.

Rescue dogs can have all kinds of backgrounds, for example:

- a self-determined life abroad without human care, for example as a street dog
- a past as a working animal, for example as a hunting dog
- a past in a human family with good or less good experiences

A dog's individual history, i.e. its socialisation and experience, influences its ability to cope in its new environment.

Some dogs settle in well, while others are overwhelmed, frightened and stressed in our living environment due to a lack of habituation and socialisation with people. It is advisable to seek the assessment of a neutral expert ([see Chapter 01.7](#)).

Dog type

Mixed-breed or purebred dog

Mixed breeds are crosses between purebred dogs/mixed breeds or breeds not recognised by the Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI).

A purebred dog has an official pedigree (Swiss Kennel Club SKG and/or FCI).

For both purebred dogs and mixed breeds, it is crucial that the parent animals are healthy and that the breeding conditions are favourable ([see Chapter 01.3](#)). There are genetic tests available for purebred dogs to rule out specific diseases as well as health examinations such as x-rays of the hips and/or elbows, etc. Many breed clubs also organise breeding approval tests.

Some breeds are divided into show and working lines (e.g. Golden and Labrador Retriever, Border Collie, Cocker Spaniel). Show lines are generally more suitable as family dogs.

Original purpose of the dog type/breed

It makes sense to research the original purpose of the breeds you are considering. Breeds differ, among other things, in their willingness to cooperate with humans,² their need for activity and their reactivity (i.e. how strongly and quickly the dog reacts to external stimuli).³ Breeds that have been bred to be highly independent and reactive may not always be suitable for first-time dog owners.

Watch out for cruel breeding practices

In certain breeds, breeding has had such an impact on their appearance that most dogs of these breeds now have major health problems. These animals suffer enormously in their everyday lives, which is why we talk about cruel breeding practices. In particular, very short-snouted (brachycephalic) dogs such as bulldogs or pugs often have problems with their breathing and spine.^{4,5} There are many more examples of dogs whose breeding gave rise to extreme characteristics detrimental to their health and welfare, such as very small dogs ("teacup dogs") or excessively large dogs, or dogs with excessive wrinkles, excessive skin or excessive fur. Animal lovers do not support cruel breeding practices.

Prohibited breeds in the canton of Zurich

The canton of Zurich has a list of breeds that must not be bred, acquired, kept or imported ([see Chapter 06](#)).

Sex of the dog

Whether a male or a female dog is chosen should be considered on an individual basis. Both genders have their advantages and disadvantages. The gender can also be decisive if it is a second dog, i.e. if there is already a dog living in the household. Advice from a specialist can also be helpful in this matter.

More about this topic

- Brochure "[Checklist for buying a dog](#)" from the Zurich Animal Welfare Association (Zürcher Tierschutz).
- Hoffmann, C. (2022). Was braucht mein Hund? Die wichtigsten Fragen rund um den Alltag mit Hund. Kosmos Verlag.
- Gruber, A. (2023). Geschundene Gefährten. Über Irrwege in der Rassezucht und unsere Verantwortung für Hund und Katze. Droemer Knauer Verlag.
- Up-to-date reports on this issue can be found on YouTube by searching for "illegal puppy trade". By keeping yourself informed, you reduce your risk of falling victim to these schemes.
- Up-to-date reports on this issue can be found on YouTube by searching for "torture breeding". By keeping yourself informed, you reduce your risk of contributing to animal suffering.

04.3

Preparation and starter equipment

Learning objectives

- **I know how to prepare my living environment (home, garden, car) for the arrival of a dog (e.g. feeding place, resting place, car travel crate).**
- **I know what basic equipment I need to get before the dog moves in.**

Anyone expecting a new dog is well advised to prepare their home for its arrival – especially if it's a puppy. This is done not only to set up a new home for the dog, but also to “dog-proof” the new home and make objects and places from which the dog is to be kept away inaccessible.

Dog-proofing a house

Examples of sources of danger that must be secured or made inaccessible

- Sockets
- Power cables
- Waste bins
- Medication, cleaning agents
- Foods that are toxic to dogs such as chocolate, alcohol, avocados, grapes, birch sugar (xylitol), macadamia nuts
- Houseplants and garden plants (often poisonous)
- Children's rooms (small items on the floor)
- Stairways
- Deep windows
- Balconies and terraces
- Doors that lead directly outside
- Unfenced gardens
- Pools or ponds

Basic equipment

Then it's time to organize the basic equipment needed for the new family member. Specialist shops offer a wide range of products in all price ranges, and the initial equipment does not have to be expensive.

Puppies and young dogs in particular are likely to chew on equipment such as dog beds, toys or dog leads, meaning that they will have to be replaced at some point. It can be worth looking at second-hand offers, as many young dogs outgrow their beds, harnesses, travel crates, etc.

Dog food

Ideally, the food from the breeder or from the dog's previous home should continue to be used during the settling-in period. A dog's diet should be tailored to its age and individual energy requirements. If symptoms of intolerance appear such as flatulence, digestive problems or itching, a carefully considered change of diet is recommended, ideally under the supervision of a nutritionist or vet.

Food bowl

The location of the food bowl should be chosen so that the dog can eat in peace and without being disturbed. Depending on the floor covering, a waterproof and non-slip mat may be useful to protect the floor.

Water bowl

The dog must always have access to fresh water from a clean bowl ([see Chapter 05](#)). Dogs often spill water when drinking. Depending on the floor covering, a waterproof and non-slip mat may be useful to protect the floor.

Chewing

Puppies and adolescent dogs in particular have a strong urge to chew, especially when they are teething. Chew toys such as a chew stick, a dog-safe piece of wood, a chew toy or even chewable items of animal origin such as scalp plates, tendons and bully sticks can be used as chew toys. Chews like these have a high energy density. In puppies and adolescent dogs, this can promote excessively rapid growth and, in some cases, joint problems. These chews are also difficult to digest and can cause stressful digestive problems such as flatulence. They should only be used in moderation as a result.

Dog bed

Dogs spend most of their lives sleeping. Ideally, the dog should have at least two sleeping areas with different surfaces to choose from. This allows it to freely choose where it sleeps depending on whether it currently needs a cool/warm, soft/hard surface. You can find out its preferences by first offering it a slightly harder and a slightly softer dog bed.

Harness

Well-padded, size-adjustable models that “grow” with the dog over time are particularly practical for growing dogs ([see Chapter 03.2](#)).

Leads

It is recommended that you have a short lead (approx. 2 metres), a longer one (e.g. 5 metres) and a spare one. Retractable leads are not recommended ([see Chapter 03.2](#)).

Toys

Every dog has its own preferences. There is a wide range available, and having a few different toys will help you get to know your dog's preferences. Toys should be designed in such a way that the dog cannot destroy or eat them, especially if they are available to the dog for independent play. Toys remain more exciting when they are not constantly available. Squeaky toys can heighten dogs' excitement and should only be offered for a short time and under supervision. Toys can also be used for joint play and as rewards.

Brush/comb, if necessary

Dogs require regular grooming as determined by the condition of their coat. Ideally, step-by-step training should begin before the first knots or tangles form. This means that the dog does not have any unpleasant experiences and learns to see grooming as a pleasant part of its routine ([see Chapter 03.3](#)).

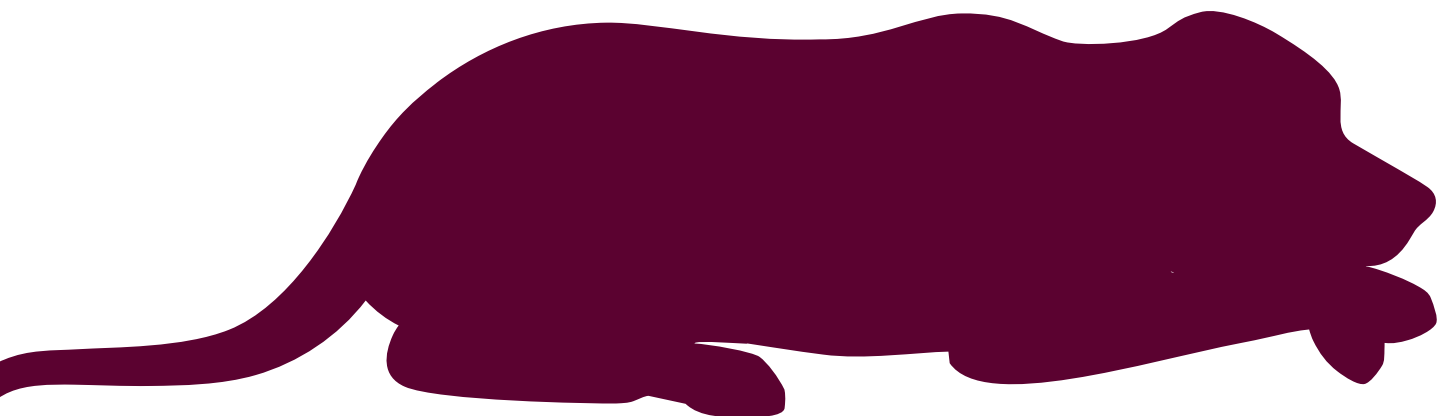
Travel crate, if necessary

By law, dogs must be secured in cars. This is stipulated by the Road Traffic Act (Strassenverkehrsgesetz (SVG)), as a dog can become a dangerous “projectile” in the event of an accident and injure people in the car. The Traffic Regulations Ordinance (Verkehrsregelnverordnung (VRV)) also states that all cargo in the car (including dogs) must be secured in such a way that driving safety is not impaired.⁶ In addition, the Animal Protection Ordinance (Tierschutzverordnung (TSchV)) states that animals may not be transported in a manner that causes them pain, suffering or harm. In the event of an accident, a dog would be exposed to a high risk of injury if it was not adequately secured. Repeated crash tests with dog dummies by the Touring Club Switzerland (TCS) have shown that solid travel crates offer the best protection.⁷ Harnesses and lightweight fabric boxes do not offer sufficient protection. An emergency exit on the travel crate is recommended. These crates are not necessarily cheap. It may be worth taking a look at the second-hand market.

- ¹ McMillan, K. M., Bielby, J., Williams, C. L., Upjohn, M., M., Casey, R. A. & Christley, R.M. (2024). Longevity of companion dog breeds: those at risk from early death. *Scientific Reports*, 14, doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-50458-w.
- ² Serpell, J. & Hsu, Y. (2005). Effects of breed, sex, and neuter status on trainability in dogs. *Anthrozoös*, 18, 196-207.
- ³ O’Heare, J. (2003). *Das Aggressionsverhalten des Hundes*. Bernau: Animal Learn Verlag. P. 75, p. 62.
- ⁴ Mellema, M. S. & Hoareau, G. L. (2015). Chapter 18 – Brachycephalic Syndrome. In D. C. Silverstein & K. Hopper (Eds.), *Small Animal Critical Care Medicine (2nd Edition)* (pp. 104-106). Amsterdam: Elsevier Inc.
- ⁵ Ryan, R., Gutierrez-Quintana, R., ter Haar, G. & De Decker, S. (2017). Prevalence of thoracic vertebral malformations in French bulldogs, Pugs and English bulldogs with and without associated neurological deficits. *The Veterinary Journal*, 221, 25-29.
- ⁶ https://www.zh.ch/de/news-uebersicht/mitteilungen/2025/sicherheit-justiz/kantonspolizei/haustiere_in_fahrzeugen.html
- ⁷ Graf, D. (2018). Metallbox hui, Geschirr pfui. *Touring*, 18.02.18. 14-17.

05

Travelling with a dog



05.1

Entering Switzerland

Learning objectives

- **I am familiar with the entry requirements for (re-)entering Switzerland with a dog.**
- **I know that I have to declare the dog to customs when I enter the country for the first time.**
- **I know that dogs with docked tails and/or cropped ears are generally prohibited from entering the country. Exceptions apply for holidays and relocation for dog owners living abroad.**
- **I know where I can find out about the entry requirements.**
- **I know where I can get the latest information on entry requirements.**

Anyone who owns a dog will sooner or later come across the topic of travelling with dogs. This topic is also important for people who acquire a dog abroad and wish to bring it into Switzerland. This chapter provides information on how to ensure that entering or returning to Switzerland does not turn into a nightmare.

Depending on the country of departure, different conditions apply to dogs entering Switzerland. Countries of departure are all countries visited during the journey. Detailed information on entry requirements can be found on the website of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO; <https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/en/home/tiere/reisen-mit-heimtieren/hunde-katzen-und-frettchen.html>).

The law differentiates between entry requirements for travellers with dogs coming from EU countries – including other European countries such as Northern Ireland, Norway and Iceland – and from third countries. Third countries are also divided into countries with a low rabies risk – such as the USA, Great Britain, Australia and Bosnia-Herzegovina – and so-called rabies risk countries, i.e. countries with a high rabies risk such as Serbia, Kosovo, Türkiye, Morocco, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

The following conditions must be met when entering from any country of departure:

- The dog is microchipped.
- The dog has been vaccinated against rabies; the vaccination is valid (see below). A special regulation applies to the private entry of puppies under 15 weeks of age.
- Dogs from EU countries and other European countries have a pet passport; for all other countries, vaccination documents, i.e. the vaccination certificate or documents certifying rabies vaccination, and a veterinary certificate are required. The latter is issued by the veterinary authority of the country of origin and contains information on ownership, the dog to be imported and its vaccination status.

A rabies vaccination is valid if the following conditions are met:

- It was carried out at the same time as or after the dog was microchipped.
- The waiting period of 21 days between the vaccination date and the protective effect was observed. This period does not apply for booster shots if they are administered while a previous vaccination continues to offer protection.
- The rabies vaccination is still valid when entering Switzerland.

The “red” exit must be used when entering the country via Zurich or Geneva airports. The dog and its entry documents must be presented.

An import permit is required for direct flights from a third country to Switzerland. It must be applied for in advance from the FSVO. The exact procedure can be found on the FSVO website.

Entering Switzerland

It is possible to enter the country with a dog acquired abroad without any problems if the following conditions are met:

When travelling from the EU

- Microchip
- EU pet passport
- Valid rabies vaccination (special regulation for the private import of puppies under 15 weeks of age)

If you are travelling from a third country with a low rabies risk

- Microchip
- Vaccination documents, e.g. a vaccination card
- Valid rabies vaccination (special regulation for the private import of puppies under 15 weeks of age)
- Veterinary certificate (see explanation above) or FSVO import permit

If you are travelling from a rabies risk country

- Microchip
- Pet passport
- Valid rabies vaccination
- Valid rabies titre (identification of rabies antibodies) by an EU-approved laboratory: Entry is permitted if the blood sample for this test was taken no earlier than 30 days after the rabies vaccination and a waiting period of at least 120 days after the rabies vaccination has been observed. The antibody level must be at least 0.5 international units (IU) per millilitre of blood.
- Veterinary certificate (see above) or FSVO import permit

When crossing the border, the dog must be declared to customs together with the documents. This also applies if the dog was not purchased but given as a gift. Customs checks compliance with import conditions regarding rabies and docking/cropping and determines whether and how much VAT is payable. For dog owners, this means that entry must take place during opening hours via a manned Swiss customs border crossing or at Zurich or Geneva airport via the “red” customs exit.

Once imported, the dog must be presented at a veterinary practice within ten days so that it can be registered in the AMICUS dog database under the dog owner's name. The personal ID is required for AMICUS registration as an “import”.

Details on obtaining the AMICUS ID can be found in [Chapter 6.2 and 6.3](#).

Re-entry of a dog into Switzerland

The term “re-entry” refers to the entry of a dog that is already registered in the dog owner's municipality of residence and registered with AMICUS.

The conditions for a problem-free return vary depending on the country of departure:

Entry from the EU or a third country with a low rabies risk

- Microchip
- Swiss pet passport or EU pet passport
- Valid rabies vaccination

Re-entry from a rabies risk country

- Microchip
- Swiss pet passport or EU pet passport
- Valid rabies vaccination
- Valid rabies titre (see above)

Dogs with docked tails or cropped ears

Swiss animal welfare legislation prohibits “aesthetically” motivated ear cropping and tail docking (see Chapter 6). However, tail docking or ear cropping for medical reasons is still permitted.

This ban also applies when entering the country:

- Dogs with docked tails or cropped ears may not be brought in. Exceptions apply if there are proven medical reasons for the docking/cropping or if the owner of the dog moves to Switzerland and the dog is brought into the country as part of the move.
- For these exceptional cases, proof must be submitted to the FSVO in good time that the dog was not cropped/docked for “aesthetic” reasons. The FSVO will then issue a corresponding confirmation, which must be presented when bringing the dog into Switzerland. Information on verification can be found on the FSVO website (<https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/en/home/tiere/reisen-mit-heimtieren/hunde-katzen-und-frettchen.html>).
- After entering the country, dogs with docked tails or cropped ears must be registered with the Veterinary Office (<https://www.zh.ch/de/umwelt-tiere/tiere/haustiere-heimtiere/hunde.html#-792208150>).

05.2

Travelling abroad

Learning objectives

- **I know that before travelling abroad with my dog I need to find out about the entry requirements for that country.**
- **I am aware of the health risks for my dog when on holiday abroad and know the obligatory contact points if I have any questions.**

Regulations when travelling to other countries

When travelling abroad with a dog, it is not only the re-entry regulations that are relevant; dog owners must also find out in advance about the entry requirements of their holiday destination and any countries they will be travelling through.

If the dog owners and their dogs do not fulfil the entry requirements of the holiday destination, entry may be refused or the dog may be isolated for a certain period of time, i.e. placed in quarantine.

Dog owners should allow sufficient preparation time: contacting the embassy or the competent veterinary authority of the country in question directly at an early stage is advised. Companies specialising in transporting animals to the destination country are also suitable points of contact for clarifying the entry conditions.

Breed bans or special requirements for certain breeds or for handling a dog in public must also be clarified in good time before departure.

When travelling with a dog in the EU – including other European countries such as Northern Ireland, Norway and Iceland – the same entry requirements apply as for entry into Switzerland (microchip, pet passport, valid rabies vaccination).

Health hazards

Depending on the country and time of year, travelling abroad can pose a number of risks for dogs: they must be protected from extreme weather conditions such as cold or heat and also from infectious diseases.

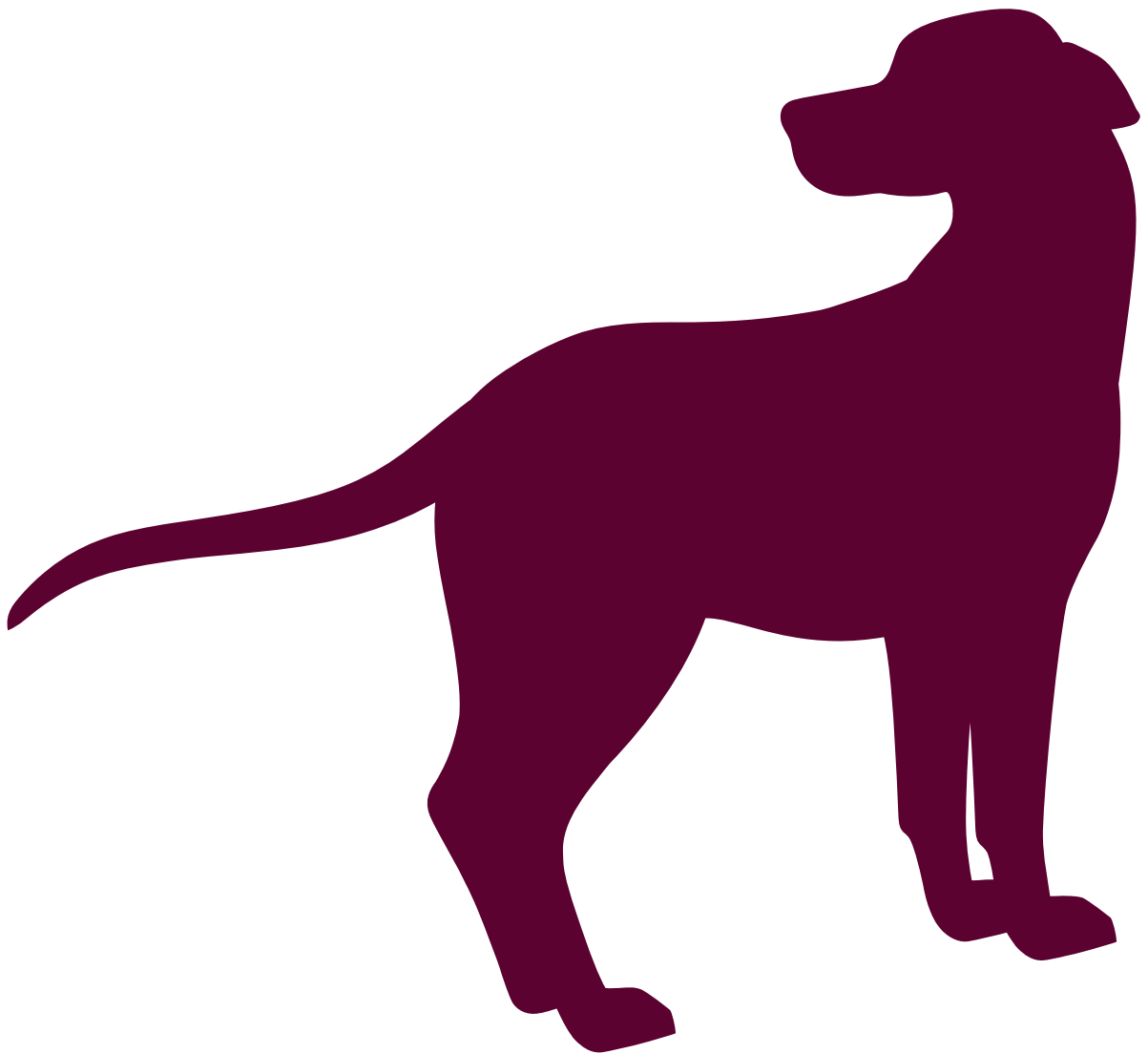
In warmer countries in particular, there is a high risk of dogs becoming infected with sometimes life-threatening pathogens, such as babesiosis, ehrlichiosis and leishmaniasis, as well as heartworms. These pathogens are also found in our neighbouring countries.

There are various ways to prevent infection (prophylaxis), depending on the pathogen. Dog owners should discuss planned trips abroad and preventive measures with their vet in good time.

If a dog falls ill after travelling abroad, dog owners must inform the responsible veterinarian about the itinerary, destination, time and duration of the trip. This ensures that the screening and diagnosis also cover diseases that are not (yet) widespread in Switzerland.

06

Dogs and the law



This chapter deals in detail with the legal requirements for keeping and handling dogs. The learning objectives are listed in the respective sub-chapters. This is not about memorising the exact wording and article numbers of the legal provisions, but rather about knowing their content and where to find the information.

Purpose of the legal provisions

The law is intended to protect animals' welfare and ensure that they are kept responsibly. Realistically, the legal provisions often stipulate the minimum conditions necessary for a dog's well-being, but not what would be best for the dog.

Example

In Switzerland, keeping dogs on a running chain is generally permitted. However, dogs must not be kept tied up permanently. The Animal Protection Ordinance (Tierschutzverordnung (TSchV)) stipulates that every dog kept on a running chain must be able to move freely for at least five hours a day, that the chain must not get caught and that the dog must also have sufficient freedom of movement on the chain. However, keeping dogs on a chain does not constitute an animal-friendly life.

Nationwide and cantonal legal regulations in Switzerland

The relevant nationwide provisions are set out in the federal animal welfare legislation, i.e. the Animal Welfare Act (German: Tierschutzgesetz (TSchG)) and the Animal Protection Ordinance, as well as in federal legislation on animal diseases, i.e. the Epizootic Diseases Act (Tierseuchengesetz (TSG)) and the Epizootic Diseases Ordinance (Tierseuchenverordnung (TSV)). At cantonal level, cantonal dog legislation also applies, i.e. the Cantonal Dog Act (Hundegesetz (HuG)) and the associated Dog Ordinance (Hundeverordnung (HuV)). As a rule, the principles are laid down in the law, while the ordinances contain more detailed explanations of these principles.

Example

The Animal Welfare Act (TSchG), which applies throughout Switzerland, states that the welfare of animals is ensured, among other things, if they are kept in such a way that their bodily functions and behaviour are not impaired and their ability to adapt is not overly challenged. The specific keeping of dogs on a running chain is regulated in the Animal Protection Ordinance (TSchV).

06.1

Animal welfare legislation

Learning objectives

- **I am familiar with and understand the relevant legal provisions in the Swiss Federal Animal Protection Ordinance (Tierschutzverordnung).**
- **I know the requirements for keeping a dog in a crate or kennel.**
- **I know under what conditions a dog may be placed in a travel crate.**

Basic legal regulations

Feeding

Like all animals kept by humans, dogs must also be provided with suitable food and water regularly and in sufficient quantities (Art. 4 TSchV). Dog owners should know that feeding is considered appropriate if it meets the needs of the animals based on experience and findings from the disciplines of physiology, behavioural science and hygiene (Art. 3 TSchV).

Feeding requirements can therefore change repeatedly over time: a dog with kidney disease, for example, needs different food to a healthy dog, and scientific knowledge about nutrition is advancing.

Examples

Feeding leftovers to dogs is not advisable. They are often too greasy, too strongly seasoned for dogs or even harmful to their health.

The same applies to feeding cat food to small breed dogs. Cat food contains considerably more protein than dog food and is therefore not suitable for small dogs.

Illnesses, injuries, death

If a dog falls ill or is injured, the dog owner/carers must ensure that it immediately receives appropriate care and treatment or, if treatment is futile or impossible, euthanised (Art. 5 TSchV).

Example

Dog owners/carers must visit a veterinary practice immediately if their dog becomes ill. Together with the vet, they will determine the best possible treatment. In the case of an old dog, this may also mean that euthanasia is appropriate, i.e. that the dog is put to sleep. Current animal welfare legislation prohibits waiting until a sick dog dies of its own accord.

Special requirements concerning care

Even though dogs' claws do not usually need to be trimmed, with the exception of the dewclaws, the latter should be checked regularly. The dewclaw, often also called the wolf claw, is an extra toe on the inside of the hind legs of some breeds that is not in contact with the ground. Because it is not used, there is a risk that it will grow inwards, which is extremely painful for the dog. Dog owners must regularly check the length of these claws and ensure that they are trimmed in a timely and professional manner (Art. 5 TSchV).

Accommodation

Dogs can be kept in different ways, for example as family dogs, guard dogs or hunting dogs. Irrespective of this, dog owners must check their dogs' condition and the state of the facilities in which they are kept as often as necessary and rectify any defects immediately (Art. 5 TSchV).

To protect the dog, it must be ensured that it cannot escape from the shelter or from an enclosure (Art. 7 TSchV). If the shelter or enclosure is outdoors, the dog must be adequately protected from the elements (Art. 6 TSchV). It is important that accommodation and enclosures ensure exposure to daylight of at least 15 lux during the day (Art. 33 TSchV).

Generally prohibited actions

As with all other animals, certain actions towards dogs are expressly prohibited by law (Art. 16 TSchV). Here are the most important prohibited actions:

- Killing animals in a cruel manner
- Organising fights between or with animals
- Abandoning or leaving animals behind with the intention of getting rid of them
- Performing sexually motivated acts with animals
- Temporarily exporting animals from Switzerland for the purpose of prohibited activities and then re-importing them
- Using fencing systems that administer an electric shock effect via a receiver device attached to the animal's body.

Actions prohibited in relation to dogs in particular

In addition to the actions prohibited for all animals described above, certain actions are expressly prohibited by law in relation to dogs (Art. 22, Art. 28, Art. 70 and Art. 76a and Art. 76b TSchV).

These include, among others:

- Tail docking and ear cropping (except for medical reasons) as well as surgical procedures to create tipped ears
- Destroying the vocal organs
- Advertising, selling, giving away or showing dogs with cropped ears or a docked tail
- The commercial import or transit of dogs under 15 weeks of age
- Cross-breeding domestic dogs with wild animals
- Separating puppies less than 56 days old from their mother or foster mother

Handling dogs, use of aids and equipment

Dogs should be kept and trained in a species-appropriate manner, with socialisation and habituation to their environment being important. This helps ensure their good-naturedness and promotes social skills.

The basic principle of dog training is that dogs like to learn continuously. It is easier for dog owners to teach their dog a behaviour or a skill than to correct behavioural problems.

The insights of learning theory ([see Chapter 02](#)) are essential for the way humans interact with their dogs.

If corrective action is required, people should be aware that there is no “cure-all”, i.e. corrective measures that are always appropriate. Corrective measures must always be adapted to the situation (Art. 73 TSchV) and be directly related to the undesired behaviour.

Corrective measures that are successful for one dog can fail with other dogs or cause fear and suffering. Humans should know their dog well enough that they know which corrective measures are appropriate in its case and in the specific situation.

Fundamentally speaking, corrective measures with or without the use of aids and equipment must not cause injury or significant pain to a dog.

Corrective measures must not severely irritate or frighten the dog (Art. 76 TSchV):

the law prohibits the use of spiked collars, slip collars without a stopper element and lead collars with inwardly protruding elements such as prong collars.

These aids in particular are often used when a dog does not walk well on a lead and constantly pulls on it. Such aids are not necessary if the dog is correctly trained to walk on a lead or if the dog's unsatisfactory ability to walk on a lead is corrected under professional guidance: the dog learns to walk on a lead without fear or pain.

Excessive force, such as hitting with hard objects, and the use of punishment devices that scare the dog with a loud bang are also prohibited.

Note: Certain devices may legally be purchased online or in shops, but their use is prohibited by law. This includes all types of electrical devices that emit acoustic signals that are unpleasant for the dog (e.g. Pet Gentle) or work by means of chemical substances, and devices to prevent the dog from making noise or expressing pain (e.g. anti-barking devices), even if they only emit water or compressed air (Art. 76 TSchV). Devices that work via vibrations are also not permitted.

Caution is advised when using aids to prevent dogs from biting, such as muzzles and straps. They must correctly fit the dog's anatomy and allow it to pant sufficiently. This regulation does not apply to short-term use, for example during treatment in a veterinary practice.

Physical integrity

Ear cropping and tail docking for "aesthetic" reasons are prohibited in Switzerland. Ear cropping and tail docking for medical reasons are exempt from this ban.

Anyone who imports or keeps a dog with a docked tail in Switzerland must prove that the shortened tail is either congenital or has been docked for medical reasons. The dog must be registered with the competent authority (Art. 22 TSchV), which will supplement the entry in the AMICUS dog database after the documents have been checked. Provided that the dog has not been illegally docked, this will be noted in the pet passport so that there is nothing to prevent the dog being brought into Switzerland again in future.

Social contacts

Dogs must have sufficient daily contact with people and, as far as possible, with other dogs (Art. 70 TSchV) (see Chapter 01.2).

Exercise (see Chapter 01.2, Chapter 03.3 and Chapter 04.1)

Dogs must be exercised daily outdoors and according to their needs. Where possible, they should also be able to run around off the lead. If they cannot be walked, they must be allowed out every day. Staying in a kennel or on a running chain is not considered exercise.

Tethered dogs must be able to move freely for at least 5 hours during the day. The rest of the time, they must be able to move on a running chain in an area that is at least 20 m² in size. They may not be tethered with a slip collar (Art. 71 TSchV).

Reporting incidents in connection with aggressive behaviour

If a dog causes serious injury to a person or animal or is excessively aggressive, certain groups of people such as veterinarians, doctors and dog trainers are required by law to report the dog and the dog owner(s) to the cantonal veterinary office (Art. 78 TSchV).

Any injury that results in a visit to the doctor or vet is considered a significant injury.

The type of injury does not matter. Excessive aggressive behaviour is defined as any behaviour by a dog that endangers people and/or animals.

Example

A person walks along the pavement past a garden fence. Suddenly a dog runs to the fence, barking. The person is startled, jumps to the side and falls onto the road. Fortunately, the car turning in is still able to stop in time.

Shelter and types of housing

Shelter

Nowadays, most dogs live as family members in the same home as their owners.

The following provisions must be complied with for a permanent or temporary outdoor shelter (Art. 72 TSchV):

- The dog must be provided with a shelter containing a suitable resting place where it can sit and lie stretched out on its side.
- The shelter must be dry and provide protection from wind, rain, cold, heat and sunlight.
- During the colder months of the year, it must be ensured that the shelter is sufficiently warm and the dog does not freeze. Especially for dogs that do not have a thick coat of fur because they do not live permanently outdoors, the shelter must be insulated and heated.
- The dog must be provided with suitable bedding material that does not irritate its skin, is dry, malleable and hygienic.

The law distinguishes between keeping a dog on a tether, in a crate and in a kennel. It does not comment specifically on keeping them in a home. Detailed information on keeping dogs in a kennel or crate as well as on travel crates can be found on the homepage of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (www.blv.admin.ch, then use the search function).

Keeping dogs in kennels

A kennel is an enclosure with a shelter, whereby access to the enclosure is always from the outside. The shelter can be the interior of a building or a dog kennel. In addition to the above, the following must be taken into account when keeping animals in kennels:

- The kennel must meet the minimum requirements set out in Annex 1, Table 10 of the Animal Protection Ordinance (Tierschutzverordnung) (Art. 72 TSchV). The size of the kennel depends on the body weight of the dogs kept in it.
- A dog in a kennel must be walked daily in accordance with its needs or given exercise (Art. 71 TSchV).
- If a dog is permanently kept alone in a kennel and has no more than five hours of contact with humans or other dogs during the day, it may be kept alone for a maximum of three months. After that, it needs visual, auditory and olfactory contact with another dog (Art. 70 TSchV).
- Every dog must have access to a shelter that protects it from the weather (Art. 72 TSchV).
- Every dog kept in a kennel must have its own place to retreat to (Art. 72 TSchV). A place to retreat can be located under the mandatory elevated lying area, for example.
- Every dog kept in a kennel must be provided with a place to lie down (Art. 72 TSchV). The lying area must be elevated and easy to keep clean and dry.
The raised lying area must be located outside the enclosed part of the kennel. The roof of the enclosed part of the kennel, a low table or a pedestal can be used as a lying area.
- It must be ensured that the dog is given an adequate supply of food and water.
- The floor must not have a negative impact on the dog's health (Art. 7 TSchV). The hard floors of kennels must be kept sufficiently clean and meet the animals' need for warmth (Art. 34 TSchV). In addition, the floors must not be perforated (Art. 72 TSchV).

Keeping dogs in crates

A crate is an enclosure within a room. This means that the crate is always entered from an interior room.

Example

If the dog is kept in a room with the door closed, the room must fulfil the minimum requirements for crates in order to comply with animal welfare regulations.

In addition to the above, the following must be observed when keeping animals in crates:

- The crate must fulfil the minimum requirements in accordance with Annex 1 Table 10 TSchV (Art. 72 TSchV). The crate's floor space requirement depends on the body weight of the dogs kept in it.
- A dog in a crate must be walked daily in accordance with its needs or be given exercise (Art. 71 TSchV).
- If the dog is permanently kept alone in a crate and has no more than five hours of contact with humans or other dogs during the day, it may be kept alone for a maximum of three months. After that, it needs visual, auditory and olfactory contact with another dog (Art. 70 TSchV).
- Every dog kept in a crate must have its own place to retreat to (Art. 72 TSchV). A place to retreat can be located under a mandatory raised lying area, for example.
- Every dog kept in a crate must be provided with a place to lie down (Art. 72 TSchV). The lying area must be elevated and easy to keep clean and dry. A low table, a pedestal or a wall-mounted board, for example, would make a suitable lying area.
- It must be ensured that the dog is given an adequate supply of food and water.
- The floor must not have a negative impact on the dog's health (Art. 7 TSchV). The hard floors of crates must be kept sufficiently clean and fulfil the animals' need for warmth (Art. 34 TSchV). In addition, the floors must not be perforated (Art. 72 TSchV).
- Rooms in which dogs are kept must use daylight for lighting (Art. 33 TSchV).

Keeping the dog in a travel crate in the home is not permitted, even if only for short periods. However, if the travel crate's locking gate is removed, it may be made available to the dog as a place to retreat to.

It is also not permitted to keep a dog in the car on a regular basis. Dogs may only be transported in cars and, if necessary, kept waiting in cars for a short time if they are secured (Art. 165 TSchV).

Example

Mr Zürcher has a lot of work to do over the next three months and can't take Luna with him into the office building. There is no one else who can take care of her. He takes Luna to work in the morning and leaves her waiting in the parked car until his lunch break. In the afternoon, Luna also waits in the car until the end of the working day. Someone reports this to the Veterinary Office. Mr Zürcher must expect that actions will be taken, such as a letter informing him that this behaviour is not permitted and possibly a report to the police.

It is only permitted to keep a dog in a travel crate when transporting it from one place to another. If the dog is transported in a travel crate in a vehicle, the crate must be large enough for the dog to at least sit and lie down in. Air travel crates are subject to special requirements in terms of size and design; specialist transport companies can provide information on these requirements if necessary.

Keeping dogs tethered

A dog may only be kept tethered to a running chain (Art. 3 TSchV). A running chain comprises a chain that runs alongside the dog when it moves because it is attached to a wire suspended in the air with a ring that slides along the entire length of the wire. When keeping a dog on a running chain, the following must be observed in addition to the above information:

- The running chain must not be attached to a slip collar, even if this has a stopper element. This means that the running chain must be attached either to a harness or to a collar without a slip function.
- Dogs on a running chain must be able to move in an area of at least 20m² (Art. 71 TSchV). This area must not be obstructed by objects such as equipment or crates.
- The running chain must not be able to wind up or get caught anywhere.
- The dog must be able to move freely for at least five hours during the day. This does not just have to mean walks. Even if the dog accompanies its human around the house or garden, this time is counted towards the five hours of free exercise.
- It must be ensured that the dog is given an adequate supply of food and water.
- If the running chain is located outdoors, the dog requires shelter that protects it from the weather and a suitable place to lie down outside the shelter (Art. 72 TSchV).
Lying areas must be raised and easy to keep clean and dry. A low table or pedestal can serve as a lying area, for example.

The website of the FSVO (<https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/de/home/tiere/tierschutz/heim-und-wildtierhaltung/hunde.html>) offers a lot of interesting information on the subject of keeping dogs in accordance with animal welfare guidelines.

06.2

Dog legislation

Learning objectives

- **I am familiar with the requirements for keeping a dog as set out in cantonal dog legislation.**
- **I am familiar with the obligations associated with keeping a dog as set out in cantonal dog legislation.**
- **I am aware of my obligations regarding registering a dog with my municipality of residence.**

Important provisions in dog legislation

The Dog Act (Hundegesetz (HuG)) of the Canton of Zurich and the associated Dog Ordinance (Hundeverordnung (HuV)) serve as the framework for the responsible and safe handling of dogs in the canton. The key points for dog owners are as follows:

- Modern regulations on dog ownership
 - Examples
 - Clear rules on how dogs are to be handled without endangering people and the environment;
 - Obligation to keep dogs on a lead in certain public places.
- Definition of requirements for keeping dogs
 - Examples
 - Ban on keeping dogs with increased risk potential (dogs on breed list II);
 - Conclusion of a valid liability insurance policy;
 - Completion of theoretical and practical dog training.

Among other things, dog legislation is intended to create the conditions required to ensure that dog owners train their dogs to be friendly companions and that there are no undesired incidents involving dogs and people. By complying with the regulations on keeping and training dogs, dog owners contribute to peaceful coexistence between people and dogs, as well as between non-dog owners and dog owners.

Requirements for keeping dogs

Certain requirements must be met in order to keep a dog.

Liability insurance (Section 6 HuG)

According to the law (Art. 56 of the Swiss Code of Obligations), dog owners are generally liable for damage caused by their dogs. It is therefore necessary for them to have valid liability insurance providing minimum cover of one million Swiss francs.

The insurance protects dog owners from the financial consequences if their dog causes damage to a person, animal or property.

As a rule, most insurers include cover for damage caused by a dog as part of the owner's personal liability insurance. However, to be on the safe side, dog owners should check with their insurance company before getting a dog.

Theoretical and practical dog training (Section 7 HuG)

Anyone who has never owned a dog or has not owned one in more than 10 years is required by law to complete theoretical dog training and pass an examination. Exceptions to this obligation are listed in the Dog Ordinance (Hundeverordnung). The following must be kept in mind in connection with theoretical dog training:

- The theory course can be completed at the earliest one year before and must be completed at the latest two months after becoming a dog owner and must be taught by a dog trainer authorised by the Veterinary Office.
- An average of two hours must be allowed for attending the course. Then there is the time required for studying and taking the exam.
- The theoretical dog training course covers the legal requirements for dog ownership, information on the needs, social behaviour and learning style of dogs, guidelines on the use of aids in dog ownership and training, as well as information on the time and financial commitment involved in owning a dog.
- After passing the test, the dog owner will receive a printed confirmation from the dog trainer. The dog owner must submit a copy of this confirmation to their municipality of residence when registering the dog, but no later than three months after taking ownership of the dog. The responsible dog trainer enters the successfully passed test into the AMICUS dog database. To do this, however, they require the AMICUS ID (see below).

After acquiring a dog or moving to the canton of Zurich with a dog, dog owners must complete practical dog training with their dogs. All dog owners must attend this course, regardless of the size and breed of the dog. Exceptions to the practical course requirement are set out in the Dog Ordinance (Hundeverordnung). The following must be kept in mind in connection with practical dog training:

- Practical dog training consists of a course comprising at least six lessons of 60 minutes each.
- All sessions must be completed by the person who is registered in the AMICUS dog database as the owner of the dog in question. Substitution is not permitted, even if it is a relative of the registered person.
- The course must be offered and run by a dog trainer with a valid licence from the Veterinary Office. Dog owners should check whether the trainer has this licence before registering. The current list of authorised dog trainers can be found on the website of the Veterinary Office (<https://www.zh.ch/de/umwelt-tiere/tiere/haustiere-heimtiere/hunde.html>).
- Practical dog training can begin at the earliest when the dog has reached the age of six months; it must be completed no later than twelve months after taking ownership of the dog.
- The practical dog training is passed when all the specified learning objectives have been achieved. This is verified through a check of the learning outcomes by the dog trainer. The learning objectives can be found on the website of the Veterinary Office (<https://www.zh.ch/de/umwelt-tiere/tiere/haustiere-heimtiere/hunde.html>).
- Dog owners who have successfully completed the compulsory practical course will receive a printed confirmation. Even if the confirmation does not have to be submitted anywhere, it is advisable to keep this confirmation in a safe place. In addition, the responsible dog trainer enters the passed course into the AMICUS dog database.

The learning objectives of practical dog training are demanding and cannot always be achieved in the prescribed six lessons. In the event of failure, additional lessons must be attended until all learning objectives have been achieved.

Banned breeds in the canton of Zurich

Like many other cantons, the canton of Zurich maintains a list of dog breeds with an increased risk potential (<https://www.zh.ch/de/umwelt-tiere/tiere/haustiere-heimtiere/hunde.html>). Keeping the breeds on this list is prohibited in the canton of Zurich.

Examples

- American Staffordshire Terrier
- Bull Terrier
- Pit Bull Terrier
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier
- Rottweiler
- Swiss Blue Bully
- Swiss Champagne Bully
- American Bully
- American Bully XXL
- American Pocket Bully

In addition to the listed dog breeds, all crossbreeds that have inherited 10% or more of their genetic material from one of the prohibited breeds are also prohibited. This means that no prohibited breed may have been crossbred to as far back as the great-grandparents.

If there is a suspicion that a dog may belong to a prohibited breed, the Veterinary Office must be consulted before the dog is purchased.

Particularly in the case of mixed breeds, a dog's appearance may suggest that it belongs to a prohibited breed. In such a case, pedigree papers must prove that no prohibited breed has been crossbred to as far back as the great-grandparents. If this proof cannot be provided, the Veterinary Office will decide whether the dog may be kept on the basis of its external appearance (phenotype).

Obligations when keeping dogs

Duty of supervision

Dog owners must keep, walk and supervise their dogs in such a way that they do not endanger people or animals, cause nuisance or interfere with the proper and safe use of freely accessible areas and do not endanger the environment (Section 9 Para. 1 HuG). This is part of the dog owner's duty of supervision (see Chapter 03.4).

Duties when walking a dog

The Dog Act (Hundegesetz) regulates the places where dogs are not permitted (Section 10 HuG) and the situations in which they must either be kept on a lead (Section 11 HuG) or muzzled (Section 12 HuG).

The Dog Act (Hundegesetz) obliges dog owners to ensure that their dogs do not contaminate cultivated land or recreational areas. It also requires dog faeces to be removed in residential and agricultural areas as well as on public paths and roads (Section 13 HuG).

For detailed information, see Chapter 3.5 (VETA Code of Conduct).

Reporting obligations at municipal level

Dog owners have the following reporting obligations to their municipality of residence:

- Dog owners must register their dogs that are older than 3 months with their municipality of residence within 10 days and provide the necessary information (Section 21 HuG). This means that all the dog's documents and confirmation of the theory course must be presented when registering the dog. The municipality of residence is the municipality in which the dog owner's documents are filed.
- If the dog is handed over to a third party, the change of owner must be reported to the municipality of residence within 10 days (Section 21 HuG).
- In the event of a change of name of the dog owner(s), a move within the municipality or to another municipality, this must be reported to the municipality within 10 days (Section 21 HuG).
- If a dog dies, it must be deregistered with the municipality of residence within 10 days (Section 21 HuG).

06.3

Obligation to register

Learning objectives

- **I know the name and function of the central AMICUS dog database.**
- **I know what I need to do to register my dog with AMICUS.**
- **I am aware of the obligation to report special incidents to AMICUS.**
- **I know the deadlines for mandatory registration.**

The obligation to register dogs is regulated in the Federal Ordinance on Epizootic Diseases (Tierseuchenverordnung (TSV)): Dogs must be microchipped no later than three months after birth, but in any case before being handed over by the dog owner who bred the dog (Art. 17 TSV). The microchip always contains a 15-digit number and is used to identify the dog individually. It is always implanted in a veterinary practice (Art. 27 TSV).

Anyone who acquires a dog born in Switzerland or abroad ([see Chapter 05](#)) must be certain that the dog is microchipped.

It is recommended that the microchip is read directly by the breeder or seller using a microchip reader when the dog is handed over.

The AMICUS dog database

AMICUS is the dog database for Switzerland. The registration of all dog owners and their dogs in this database is mandatory (Art. 16 TSV).

In addition to the address and contact details of the dog owner, the dog's name, place of origin, breed, sex, microchip number, pet passport number and the training required and carried out in the canton of Zurich are recorded.

AMICUS documents the entire life history of the dog from birth or the time of import until its death.

Thanks to the owner data stored in AMICUS, dogs that are found can be quickly returned to their owners. The database also reduces the risk of unwanted dogs simply being abandoned.

Setting up an AMICUS account

Dog owners without an AMICUS account must report to their municipality of residence within 10 days of acquiring the dog. The municipality records the personal data and opens an account with AMICUS. Ideally, dog owners should already be registered in AMICUS before completing the theoretical dog training. Only then can the passed theoretical dog training be entered. This entry can be viewed by the authorities (municipality, Veterinary Office), making it easier to check whether the mandatory training has been completed.

Once the account has been opened in AMICUS, the dog owner will immediately receive a registration confirmation from AMICUS with a personal ID and password. This access data should be kept in a safe place.

Procedure for registering a dog

If a dog is not yet registered in AMICUS, the dog owner must make an appointment for the initial registration at a veterinary practice. In addition to the dog, they must take all the dog's documents and the personal ID from AMICUS with them to this appointment. Without this personal ID, the dog cannot be registered with AMICUS.

If a person acquires a dog that is already registered in AMICUS, the new owner must provide their personal ID and their first and last name to the previous owner. The previous owner must then register the dog for a “change of ownership” in AMICUS. The new owner can then log in to their AMICUS account and confirm the change of ownership. Once the change of ownership has been confirmed, the dog will be correctly registered with AMICUS under the new owner’s name.

Obligation to report incidents to AMICUS

Dog owners have the following reporting obligations to AMICUS:

- If a dog is taken into care for longer than three months or acquired, this fact must be recorded in AMICUS within 10 days (Art. 17d TSV).
- If a dog is sold, given away or placed in the care of a third party for more than three months, this fact must also be recorded in AMICUS within 10 days (Art. 17d TSV).
- Transfers to persons abroad must be reported to the municipality within 10 days. They will then correctly deregister the dog in AMICUS.
- A dog’s date of death must be recorded in AMICUS within 10 days (Art. 17d TSV). Dog owners are well advised to consult with the municipality and/or veterinary practice and clarify who will be responsible for recording dogs in AMICUS.

The contact details – surname, first name, address, telephone number, e-mail address – should always be up to date. This is the only way to ensure that lost and found dogs are quickly returned to their owners thanks to the microchip data and AMICUS entry. Note: Dog owners can update their e-mail address and telephone number in their AMICUS account at any time. Only the municipality can make changes to names and addresses.

If you have any questions, the previous owner, the municipality or the veterinary practice will be happy to help. There is also a guide on the AMICUS website (<https://www.amicus.ch>).

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