



TRAINING TIPS

BATs and CATs

Behavioral Adjustment Training (BAT) and Constructional Aggression Treatment (CAT) both rely on the dog receiving a functional reward for offering a calm behavior in the presence of a stressor where s/he had previously presented reactive or aggressive behavior. The reward is often increased distance from the stressor.

Previously the dog learned that aggression or reactivity would make the stressor go away, thereby increasing the frequency of that behavior. S/he now learns that aggression or reactivity no longer work, but calm behavior will make the stressor go away.

The two following protocols are simplified versions based on the work of Grisha Stewart (BAT), and of Kelly Snider and Jesus Rosales-Ruiz (CAT).

BAT

The stressor could be a person, a dog, a trash can—whatever worries your dog. You can initially practice the protocol with something that's not so worrying, so as to build the behavior.

Working with a volunteer stressor:

1. Have the volunteer stressor sit or stand in a fixed location
2. Move with your dog on lead toward the stressor
3. Just as your dog notices the stressor, but before s/he reacts, pause and wait for him or her to offer a calm behavior, or disengage in any way from watching the stressor. Some behaviors might be:
 - An ear flick back to you
 - Sniffing the ground
 - Looking away
4. Mark with a happy word in a happy tone such as “Yes”, or “Yay”, or “Yippee” while turning to run away happily. The reward is the increased distance, but you may also give your dog a bonus reward of a food treat after your happy run-away if it helps keep your dog calm and happy.
5. Repeat steps 2-4, decreasing the distance between your dog and the stressor little bit by little bit as your dog continues to be able to offer calm behavior after noticing the stressor.
6. End the session while your dog is still having a good time. Five or ten minutes can be *plenty* of time for good learning to take place.
7. When you begin your next BAT session be sensitive to your dog when choosing your starting distance. It will probably be more than the distance at which you ended the previous session.

It's possible to do BAT in the field, taking advantage of stressors that occur in the environment (e.g. dogs entering and leaving the vet, children at a playground). Be sensitive to your dog's “threshold distance,” the distance at which your dog notices the stressor but doesn't overreact.

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CAT

As with BAT, the stressor could be a person, a dog, a bicycle—whatever worries your dog. You can initially practice the protocol with something that's not so worrying, so as to build the behavior.

You will need to work with a volunteer stressor:

1. Have your dog on lead or tethered at a fixed location
2. Have the stressor move toward your dog until the dog notices the stressor, but is not yet overreacting.
3. Wait for your dog to offer a calm behavior, or disengage in any way from watching the stressor. Some behaviors might be:
 - An ear flick back to you
 - Sniffing the ground
 - Looking away
4. Have the stressor move away, rewarding your dog for calm behavior with increased distance.
5. Repeat steps 2-4, decreasing the distance between your dog and the stressor little bit by little bit as your dog continues to be able to offer calm behavior after noticing the stressor.
6. End the session while your dog is still able to work. CAT sessions can be lengthy, but 15 minutes can also be plenty of time for good learning to take place if your dog is beginning to learn what works.
7. As the CAT sessions progress your dog may begin to offer affiliative behavior toward the stressor.
8. When you begin your next CAT session be sensitive to your dog when choosing your starting distance. It will probably be more than the distance at which you ended the previous session.

In general I prefer to use a BAT approach because the dog controls its own movement toward and away from the stressor through its body language, but there are many times where that's not feasible, such as when a visitor comes to the front door if you have a small apartment and a big dog. Also, when dealing with a situation that involves the approach of a stressor CAT may be a good choice to train alternative behavior.

Note that these are simplified versions of the two protocols. If you'd like more information, try some of these resources:

*The official BAT website with links to books and e-books, DVDs, and free online resources:
<http://functionalrewards.com/bat-videos-books/behavior-adjustment-training-book/>*

If you'd like to read the CAT thesis it's online in a number of libraries including: http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc5120/m2/1/high_res_d/thesis.pdf. A 6 DVD set is available at <http://www.tawzerdog.com/constructional-aggression-treatment-c-a-t-for-dogs-10245.html> and <http://www.dogwise.com/ItemDetails.cfm?ID=DTB947>. Finally, there is an excellent and accessible explanation of CAT at http://www.training-your-dog-and-you.com/constructional_aggression_treatment.html.